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AUSTRALIA

PLAYBOY

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PLAYBOY'S MEMORABLE INTERVIEW

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PLAYBOY

WEED WARRIOR:
Cannabis Knows Best

In the first installment of a series of columns on his deep relationship with cannabis, our writer shares his origin story as a pot prophet—someone who lives in service to the leafy green goodness, from smuggling to smoking to selling

BY **ANDREW DEANGELO** ILLUSTRATIONS **ROB STITES**

For the better part of four decades, my life has revolved around cannabis. I have sold, grown, smuggled, transported and hidden it. I have pushed to make it legal. I have opened a cannabis retail shop. I have become an evangelical priest and political operative for the cannabis plant.

I estimate that I have touched more than a billion dollars' worth of cannabis over my career. Thousands of pounds of weed have passed through my hands. Tens of thousands of people have enjoyed and been healed by the cannabis I've traded. I say this not to inflate my sense of value or ego, but to illustrate just how much smarter cannabis is than I am.

I first encountered cannabis in high school when I was 15 years old, and it's been a daily part of my life ever since. I'm 52 now, and I have served this plant for 37 years, helping it propagate all over the world. I've put my life and freedom at risk to spread cannabis far and wide. My entire value system is built around the lessons I learned while under the influence of the intoxicating allure of cannabis.

Engaging my endocannabinoid system daily with external cannabinoids has made me a softer and wiser person, one who understands that I'm just a small part of the web of life. And I have come to revere the life force that makes the sun burn and our hearts beat—the life force that embodies both the cannabis plant and the sentient being known as myself. We've been together a long time now. You might say we are the best of friends.

I knew it would be this way during that first smoke way back in 1984. A serious sports injury had just crushed my dreams of becoming a professional athlete, and I sat, depressed, in my mom's kitchen. My older brother handed me a joint. "It'll make you feel better," he said. I had resisted similar overtures in the past, but a little voice deep inside told me to hit that joint. And when the joint hit me back, the transformative effects that cannabis has on many people happened to me instantaneously. My sadness lifted, and I began to see that there was more to life than playing sports. Suddenly I had a new ally—this plant that I could turn to for strength, wisdom and inspiration.

This realization was incredibly liberating for me as a young man trying to find his place in the world. I knew I had to keep being with this plant and had to help others do the same. And at the age of 15, that's about all I knew—that and the fact that change is the only constant. I was just learning how to be in the world, but somehow I knew that I had to sell weed. What happened to me needed to happen to everybody. The plant was so wise. If I could just get it into the hands of more people, the rest of the work would be done by Mama Ganja. The world would become a more compassionate place by default.

What I didn't know was just how hard it would be to break cannabis prohibition and erase the stigma that goes with it. I had figured it would be easy because even at 15 years old, I saw the absurdity of cannabis prohibition. But I had no way of knowing or understanding the kind of sacrifice needed to do something as monumental as getting the U.S. to legalize weed. I didn't know my quest would cost me relationships I cared about but could not sustain as I worked underground, as well as careers and other aspirations that were closed to me, out of reach due to my cannabis advocacy during a time when the war on drugs was all the rage. I didn't know that I would be busted and locked up, which happened to many family members and friends of mine as well.

Cannabis is in the driver's seat: We are merely passengers on a journey to somewhere better.

Those things caused me a lot of personal pain by subjecting me to rejection and ostracization for no good reason. I was in a constant state of doubt about my life and choices. And through it all, cannabis provided comfort, relief and reassurance that I was on the right path—even if it was very dark, sometimes, with no end in sight. The cannabis community that I helped foster underground, and later above ground, has always been the source of healing and opportunity for me. All these brothers and sisters have been touched by cannabis the same way I've been. Together, we all have a similar understanding that cannabis is in the driver's seat: We are merely passengers on a journey to somewhere better.

Our role is to end cannabis prohibition, free the plant and create a global hemp economy. The plant will take it from there because the plant got us this far. Cannabis will soon be cultivated everywhere on earth. It is a plant that has bloomed inside human physiology and integrated itself in our DNA; a plant that can be food, fiber, fuel and medicine; a plant that has captured the imagination of science, art, music and pop culture. It is a plant that has a wisdom far beyond our own.

I am grateful to be in service of cannabis because cannabis is smarter than I am. Mama Ganja knows where she's going. I just have to help her get there.

Celebrating 60 Years of the Playboy Advisor

From grope suits to grapefruits, our sex-positive advice column has been satisfying the curious on matters of the heart, body and soul for six decades

BY **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS**

PHOTO BY **POMPEO POSAR**

It can be hard to imagine a world in which answers weren't as easy to come by as simply shouting a question at your phone or across the room ("Siri, what is shrimping?" "Alexa, can you define spectrophilia?") But 60 years ago information wasn't so readily available—especially when the issue involved sex. So when PLAYBOY debuted its Advisor column in 1960, it's no surprise that it quickly became a popular resource for those curious about sex and how to live the good life.

Each month the Advisor provided a forum where anonymous men and women could ask questions of a dependable authority without fear of judgment. Whether addressing the definition of a flying Philadelphia fuck (fellatio, with partner assists from a rocking chair and chin-up bar) or explaining the nature of the goat's eyelid (an ancient sex toy), the Advisor was a trusted voice of reason, assuring readers their urges, interests and bodies were, for the most part, totally normal.

"Our mission in life is to make sex better for everyone," declared the Advisor in 2001, a mantra that holds true today. Yet far from promoting a conquering or cavalier attitude toward sex, the Advisor regularly counseled patience and understanding between partners and would-be paramours. A 2000 study of Playboy Advisor's first four decades, written by a sociologist and two psychologists, concluded that its content "tended toward tolerance, promoted equality between the sexes and broke down, rather than reaffirmed, stereotypes."

Below, we look back at some of our favorite reader letters, one from each of Advisor's first six decades of publication. Here's to 60 more years of solid advice!

1960s: Looks Like He Made It

In December 1965 the Advisor published a letter from a young man at a crossroads. "B. M." said he was a rising star in the corporate world who was thinking about abandoning his success to pursue his musical dreams. The Advisor encouraged him to risk it. The young man who took the advice? Barry Manilow.

Q: Music has always been a vital part of my life. Due to financial difficulties, however, I had to stop attending music school and accept a job at a leading radio-and-television network. Through enormous good fortune, I have been promoted very rapidly and at the age of 22 I hold a junior executive position with a very generous salary. The only drawback is that this position has absolutely nothing to do with music. During these past few years, between working and attending college, I have managed to musically direct and conduct three full-scale musicals at various theater workshops in New York. I now have an offer to take this last musical out of town for a period of six to eight months at a good salary with the promise of a permanent position as a musical director. My musical wild oats are screaming to be sown, but it means giving up my secure job. Leaves of absence are rare, so it looks like it's either one or the other. Any suggestions? —B. M., Brooklyn, New York

A: *Follow your real interest and take the musical out of town. At your age, your financial responsibilities are few. If you remain in the secure job, you may regret for the rest of your life that you didn't sow your notes. You can always go back to radio and television: Your ability was recognized once, chances are it would be recognized again—if not with your former employer then elsewhere.*

1970s: Dress for Success

Kinksters and the sexually curious found a listening ear in the Advisor. This letter from August 1975 concerns a reader's quest for specialized gear for herself. Sure, it was the "me" decade, but the Advisor was a constant source of encouragement for sexual exploration and the normalization of self-pleasure.

Q: I've been reading about a Scandinavian sex device called a grope suit. Supposedly, it will keep a woman in an almost constant state of orgasm. Would you know anything about it—for instance, where I could purchase the device? —Miss F. D., Melbourne, Florida

A: *Grope suits came out of the closet after Alex Comfort devoted a paragraph to them in Joy of Sex. In case your little brother stole your copy, Comfort describes the attire as a m"very tight rubber G string with a thick phallic plug which fits in the vagina and a roughened knob over the clitoris. The bra has small toothed recesses in the cups which grip the nipples and is covered all over inside with soft rubber points. Once it is on, every movement touches a sensitive area." Yee-hah. In spite of publicity, it's almost impossible to find a grope suit in this country. The Sears catalog doesn't mention one. ... Invent your own erotic wardrobe: bikinis made out of waist chains, leather thongs, feathered boas, inflated balloons—the fittings are a gas. In cool weather, an inside-out fur coat is a reliable turn-on. If you believe that less is more, try going out on a date without wearing underwear. You'll find that clothes can make a woman.*

1980s: Hygiene Hijinks

Along with copious queries about positions, performance and penis size, questions about oral sex have been a popular topic in Advisor across the decades. This variation on "don't eat before swimming" appeared in November 1988.

Q: I've heard that it is dangerous to brush your teeth or floss before performing oral sex. Why? —P. U., Dallas, Texas

A: *If God had wanted you to floss before having oral sex, he wouldn't have provided pubic hair. Actually, a recent issue of Sexuality Today warned against brushing before having a bedtime snack—it is thought that you might lacerate your gums, thus opening the way to sexually transmitted infection. Of course, if you never brush your teeth, you won't be able to attract a partner in the first place. This advice assumes that your partner has an infection. If he or she doesn't, then continue with your normal program for oral hygiene.*

1990s: Orange You Glad to See Me

The 2017 comedy Girls Trip immortalized grapefruiting—a blow-job-abetting move that real-life sex educator Auntie Angel had been teaching for at least a decade prior. In August 1994 the Advisor addressed a question from a reader whose adventurous but misinformed girlfriend turned him into a fan of sexy citrus play.

She halved the third orange and rubbed it all over her body, which I licked clean.

Q: I thought I had experienced everything in the erotic world until the night my girlfriend came into my bedroom stark naked, holding three large oranges and a knife. She carved a hole in the end of the first one and allowed the juice to drip all over my genitals. She cut the second one into four wedges, squeezed them and licked the juice off my scrotum. She then forced the head of my erect penis into the hole of the first orange, gently squeezing and turning the orange until I came. She halved the third orange and rubbed it all over her body, which I licked clean. Then she asked me to squirt the juice directly into her vagina. Have you ever heard of having sex with citrus fruit? My girlfriend says citric acid fights infection. Is that true? —F. B., Hesperia, Michigan

A: *Sounds as if you had a delicious time. Your girlfriend is an inspired and imaginative woman, but her claim that citric acid fights infection is false. Citric acid will sting when applied to a cut, but it is not an antiseptic. However, you needn't worry about scurvy in the near future.*

We don't doubt your penis grew, but the only moon that has any influence on it is your wife's ass.

2000s: Moon Units

The Advisor is well known for respectful guidance on serious questions. But regarding this September 2001 letter, you know what they say about asking a ridiculous question.

Q: My wife told me that my erection appears larger on nights with a full moon. I didn't believe her, so she measured me every night for two months. And, sure enough, on nights just before, during and after a full moon, I was half an inch longer. Have you heard of this before? Does it have anything to do with the moon's gravitational pull? —R. J., New York, New York

A: *That's a new one. Does your pubic hair get thicker too? We don't doubt your penis grew, but the only moon that has any influence on it is your wife's ass. You both expected it to be larger in the moonlight, which influenced how aroused you became when she prepared you and took measurements. That could easily account for that half inch. Under controlled conditions, there would be no difference. The moon does not move the blood or water in your body as it does the tides, and its gravitational pull is a function of its distance from the Earth, not its phase. Nevertheless, your wife should continue to stroke and examine your erection every day.*

2010s: Unicorns Beware

For more than 50 years, the Advisor was a man. That changed in 2016, when the appropriately named Rachel Rabbit White pulled on the Advisor mantle and began addressing topics including toxic friendships, manic pixie fuck-boys, chemsex and this memorable installment on thirsty threesomes.

Q: We're a heterosexual couple in search of a "unicorn" (an attractive bisexual woman) to join us for a few date nights a week. We've had some one-off threesomes but can't find a partner to join us more long-term. Apps, dating sites, friends, acquaintances—nothing has worked. What are we doing wrong?

A: *Unicorn hunters have a bad reputation. Perhaps it's the polyamorous community's endless lingo: ambigusweetie, new relationship energy, friends-first swinging and other terms that reek of corporate buzzwords. One has to wonder if all polyamorous people are middle managers. Of the threesome-seeking couples on Tinder, inevitably she is bi but without much experience, and of course he loves to watch. Tina, a former unicorn, has been on her share of "throuple" dates. "These couples are called unicorn hunters because they're often predatory," she says. Couples end up treating her like a fantasy rather than a partner; these pairs are simply looking for someone to fill a preimagined role.*

To answer your question, You may not be doing anything wrong. Dating itself consists of endless trial and error, as well as numerous bar tabs that never pay off. In ancient Greece the unicorn was believed to be a real beast. In medieval times the lack of proof of the animal's existence helped move it into the realm of myth. And as you're discovering, the fantasy of a third person, one who enters and exits a relationship with ghostly ease, is just as unattainable.

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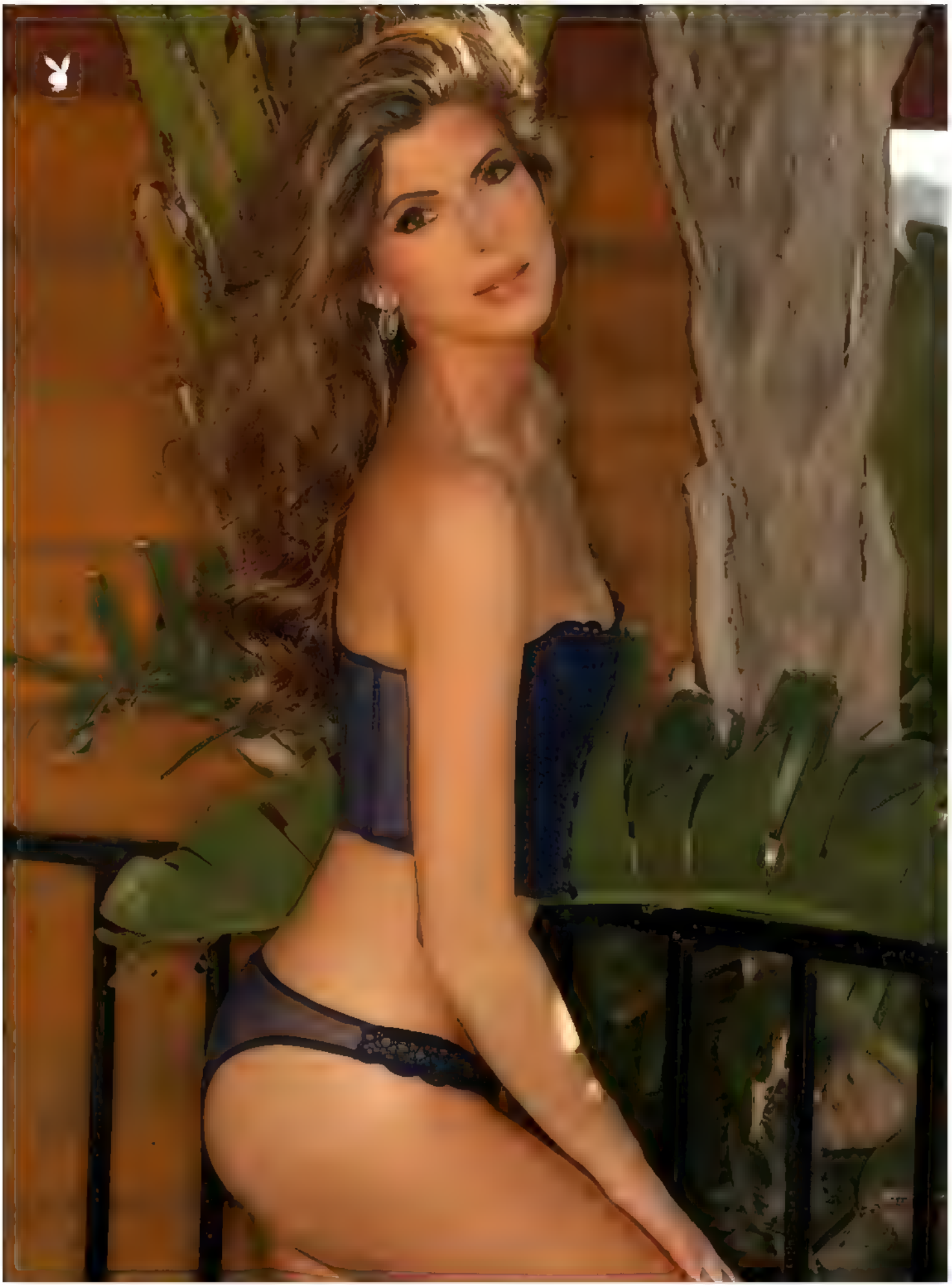


Welcome back to the Playboy family! What does this mean to you? The Playboy family is very important to me! I was able to meet so many wonderful people and make great memories with Playboy

What do you think of when it comes to Playboy and the iconic bunny? Playboy and the iconic bunny make me think of the glamour of classic Hollywood! The Playboy Clubs and the Bunny Jet

What type of music do you listen to? Favorite artist? My favorite music depends on my mood! I listen to all kinds of music. I love music that reminds me of what I do when I hear a certain song!

Do you like to cook? If so, what's your specialty? I don't like to cook! If I did I would cook seafood

Favorite cocktail? I love wine so my favorite cocktail would be a mimosa!

Read the book or watch the movie? I enjoy movies so I would prefer to watch the movie but I also like to read

Do you prefer the beach or the pool? I prefer the pool! Especially if it overlooks the beach

Summer or Winter? I love both seasons! Summer is the bikini season and winter is the holidays!

If you could be any animal, what would you be and why? I would be a cheetah! I love cats and they are the fastest and most recognizable cat!

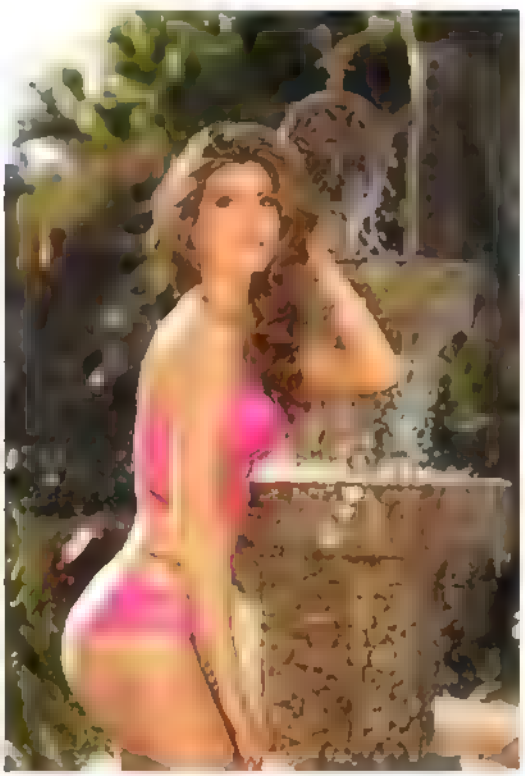
Describe yourself using 3 adjectives... Genuine, joyful, adventurous

Wildest and craziest place you got intimate... Hmm! Disney World!

Describe your perfect date. A view of the mountains or ocean and a good glass of wine!

Any pet peeves? My pet peeves are bullying and cheapness

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now... In Napa California with a few horses



Playboy Interview

John Lennon and Yoko Ono

A candid conversation with the reclusive couple about their years together and their surprisingly frank views on life with and without the Beatles

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID SHEFF** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TOM ZUK**

To describe the turbulent history of the Beatles, or the musical and cultural mileposts charted by John Lennon, would be an exercise in the obvious. Much of the world knows that Lennon was the guiding spirit of the Beatles, who were themselves among the most popular and profound influences of the 1960s, before breaking up bitterly in 1970. Some fans blamed the breakup on Yoko Ono, Lennon's Japanese-born second wife, who was said to have wielded a disproportionate influence over Lennon, and with whom he has collaborated throughout the 1970s. In 1975, the Lennons became unavailable to the press, and though much speculation has been printed, they emerged to dispel the rumors—and to cut a new album—only a couple of months ago. The Lennons decided to speak with PLAYBOY in the longest interview they have ever granted. Freelance writer David Sheff was tapped for the assignment, and when he and a PLAYBOY editor met with Ono to discuss ground rules, she came on strong. Responding to a reference to other notables who had been interviewed in PLAYBOY, Ono said, "People like Carter represent only their country. John and I represent the world." But by the time the interview was concluded several weeks later, Ono had joined the project with enthusiasm. Here is Sheff's report:

"There was an excellent chance this interview would never take place. When my contacts with the Lennon-Ono organization began, one of Ono's assistants called me, asking, seriously, 'What's your sign?' The interview apparently depended on Yoko's interpretation of my horoscope, just as many of the Lennons' business decisions are reportedly guided by the stars. I could imagine explaining to my PLAYBOY editor, 'Sorry, but my moon is in Scorpio—the interview's off.' It was clearly out of my hands. I supplied the info: December 23, three P.M., Boston.

"Thank my lucky stars. The call came in and the interview was tentatively on. And I soon found myself in New York, passing through the ominous gates and numerous security checkpoints at the Lennons' headquarters, the famed Dakota apartment building on Central Park West, where the couple dwells and where Yoko Ono holds court beginning at eight o'clock every morning.

"Ono is one of the most misunderstood women in the public eye. Her mysterious image is based on some accurate and some warped accounts of her philosophies and her art statements, and on the fact that she never smiles. It is also based—perhaps unfairly—on resentment of her as the sorceress/Svengali who controls the very existence of John Lennon. That image has remained through the years since she and John met, primarily because she hasn't chosen to correct it. So as I removed my shoes before treading on her fragile carpet—those were the instructions—I wondered what the next test might be.

"Between interruptions from her two male assistants busy screening the constant flow of phone calls, Yoko gave me the once-over. She finally explained that the stars had, indeed, said it was right—very right, in fact. Who was I to argue? So the next day, I found myself sitting across a couple of cups of cappuccino from John Lennon.

"Lennon, still bleary-eyed from lack of sleep and scruffy from lack of shave, waited for the coffee to take hold of a system otherwise used to operating on sushi and sashimi—'dead fish,' as he calls them—French cigarettes and Hershey bars with almonds.

"Within the first hour of the interview, Lennon put every one of my preconceived ideas about him to rest. He was far more open and candid and witty than I had any right to expect. He was prepared, once Yoko had given the initial go-ahead, to frankly talk about everything. Explode was more like it. If his sessions in primal-scream therapy were his emotional and intellectual release 10 years ago, this interview was his more recent vent. After a week of conversations with Lennon and Ono separately as well as together, we had apparently established some sort of rapport, which was confirmed early one morning.

"'John wants to know how fast you can meet him at the apartment,' announced the by-then-familiar voice of a Lennon-Ono assistant. It was a short cab ride away and he briefed me quickly: 'A guy's trying to serve me a subpoena and I just don't want to deal with it today. Will you help me out?' We sneaked into his limousine and streaked toward the recording studio three hours before Lennon was due to arrive. Lennon told his driver to slow to a crawl as we approached the studio and instructed me to lead the way inside, after making sure the path was safe. 'If anybody comes up with papers, knock them down,' he said. 'As long as they don't touch me, it's okay.' Before I left the car, Lennon pointed to a sleeping wino leaning against the studio wall. 'That could be him,' Lennon warned. 'They're masters of disguise.' Lennon high-tailed it into the elevator, dragging me along with him. When the elevator doors finally closed, he let out a nervous sigh and somehow the ludicrousness of the morning dawned on him. He broke out laughing. 'I feel like I'm back in "Hard Day's Night" or "Help!"' he said.

"As the interview progressed, the complicated and misunderstood relationship between Lennon and Ono emerged as the primary factor in both of their lives. 'Why don't people believe us when we say we're simply in love?' John pleaded. The enigma called Yoko Ono became accessible as the hard exterior broke down—such as the morning when she let out a hiccup right in the middle of a heavy discourse on capitalism. Nonplused by her hiccup, Ono giggled. With that giggle, she became vulnerable and cute and shy—not at all the creature that came from Japan to brainwash John Lennon.

"Ono was born in 1933 in Tokyo, where her parents were bankers and socialites. In 1951, her family moved to Scarsdale, New York. She attended Sarah Lawrence College. In 1951, Yoko was married for the first time, to Toshi Ichiyanagi, a musician. They were divorced in 1964 and later that year, she married Tony Cox, who fathered her daughter, Kyoko. She and Cox were divorced in 1967, two years before she married Lennon.

"The Lennon half of the couple was born in October 1940. His father left home before John was born to become a seaman and his mother, incapable of caring for the boy, turned John over to his aunt and uncle when he was four and a half. They lived several blocks away from his mother in Liverpool, England. Lennon, who attended Liverpool private schools, met a kid named Paul McCartney in 1956 at the Woolton Parish Church Festival in Liverpool. The following year, the two formed their first band, the Nurk Twins. In 1958, John formed the Quarrymen, named after his high school. He asked Paul to join the band and agreed to audition a friend of Paul's, George Harrison. In 1959, the Quarrymen disbanded but later regrouped as Johnny and the Moon Dogs and then the Silver Beatles. They played in clubs, backing strippers, and they got their foot in the door of Liverpool's showcase Cavern Club. Pete Best was signed on as drummer and the Silver Beatles left England for Hamburg, where they played eight hours a night at the Indra Club. The Silver Beatles became the Beatles and, by 1960, when they returned to England, the band had become the talk of Liverpool. In 1962, John married Cynthia Powell and they had a son, Julian. John and Cynthia were divorced in 1968. Later in 1962, Richard Starkey—or Ringo Starr—replaced Best as the Beatles' drummer and the rest—as Lennon often says sarcastically—is pop history."

PLAYBOY: The word is out. John Lennon and Yoko Ono are back in the studio, recording again for the first time since 1975, when they vanished from public view. Let's start with you, John. What have you been doing?
LENNON: I've been baking bread and looking after the baby.
PLAYBOY: With what secret projects going on in the basement?
LENNON: That's like what everyone else who has asked me that question over the last few years says. "But what else have you been doing?" To which I say, "Are you kidding?" Because bread and babies, as every housewife knows, is a full-time job. After I made the loaves, I felt like I had conquered something. But as I watched the bread being eaten, I thought, Well, Jesus, don't I get a gold record or knighted or nothing?
PLAYBOY: Why did you become a house-husband?
LENNON: There were many reasons. I had been under obligation or contract from the time I was 22 until well into my 30s. After all those years, it was all I knew. I wasn't free. I was boxed in. My contract was the physical manifestation of being in prison. It was more important to face

myself and face that reality than to continue a life of rock 'n' roll—and to go up and down with the whims of either your own performance or the public's opinion of you. Rock 'n' roll was not fun anymore. I chose not to take the standard options in my business—going to Vegas and singing your great hits, if you're lucky, or going to hell, which is where Elvis went.

ONO: John was like an artist who is very good at drawing circles. He sticks to that and it becomes his label. He has a gallery to promote that. And the next year, he will do triangles or something. It doesn't reflect his life at all. When you continue doing the same thing for 10 years, you get a prize for having done it.

LENNON: You get the big prize when you get cancer and you have been drawing circles and triangles for 10 years. I had become a craftsman and I could have continued being a craftsman. I respect craftsmen, but I am not interested in becoming one.

ONO: Just to prove that you can go on dishing out things.

PLAYBOY: You're talking about records, of course.

LENNON: Yeah, to churn them out because I was expected to, like so many people who put out an album every six months because they're supposed to.

PLAYBOY: Would you be referring to Paul McCartney?

LENNON: Not only Paul. But I had lost the initial freedom of the artist by becoming enslaved to the image of what the artist is supposed to do. A lot of artists kill themselves because of it, whether it is through drink, like Dylan Thomas, or through insanity, like Van Gogh, or through V.D., like Gauguin.

PLAYBOY: Most people would have continued to churn out the product. How were you able to see a way out?

LENNON: Most people don't live with Yoko Ono.

PLAYBOY: Which means?

LENNON: Most people don't have a companion who will tell the truth and refuse to live with a bullshit artist, which I am pretty good at. I can bullshit myself and everybody around. Yoko. That's my answer.

PLAYBOY: What did she do for you?

LENNON: She showed me the possibility of the alternative. "You don't have to do this." "I don't? Really? But—but—but—but—but...." Of course, it wasn't that simple and it didn't sink in overnight. It took constant reinforcement. Walking away is much harder than carrying on. I've done both. On demand and on schedule, I had turned out records from 1962 to 1975. Walking away seemed like what the guys go through at 65, when suddenly they're supposed to not exist anymore and they're sent out of the office [knocks on the desk three times]: "Your life is over. Time for golf."

PLAYBOY: Yoko, how did you feel about John's becoming a househusband?

ONO: When John and I would go out, people would come up and say, "John, what are you doing?" but they never asked about me, because, as a woman, I wasn't supposed to be doing anything.

LENNON: When I was cleaning the cat shit and feeding Sean, she was sitting in rooms full of smoke with men in three-piece suits that they couldn't button.

ONO: I handled the business: old business—Apple, Maclen [the Beatles' record company and publishing company, respectively] and new investments.

LENNON: We had to face the business. It was either another case of asking some daddy to come solve our business or having one of us do it. Those lawyers were getting a quarter of a million dollars a year to sit around a table and eat salmon at the Plaza. Most of them didn't seem interested in solving the problems. Every lawyer had a lawyer. Each Beatle had four or five people working. So we felt we had to look after that side of the business and get rid of it and deal with it before we could start dealing with our own life. And the only one of us who has the talent or the ability to deal with it on that level is Yoko.

PLAYBOY: Did you have experience handling business matters of that proportion?

ONO: I learned. The law is not a mystery to me anymore. Politicians are not a mystery to me. I'm not scared of all that establishment anymore. At first, my own accountant and my own lawyer could not deal with the fact that I was telling them what to do.

LENNON: There was a bit of an attitude that this is John's wife, but surely she can't really be representing him.

ONO: A lawyer would send a letter to the directors, but instead of sending it to me, he would send it to John or send it to my lawyer. You'd be surprised how much insult I took from them initially. There was all this, "But you don't know anything about law; I can't talk to you." I said, "All right, talk to me in the way I can understand it. I am a director too."

LENNON: They can't stand it. But they have to stand it, because she is who represents us. [Chuckles] They're all male, you know, just big and fat, vodka lunch, shouting males, like trained dogs, trained to attack all the time. Recently, she made it possible for us to earn a large sum of money that benefited all of them and they fought and fought not to let her do it, because it was her idea and she was a woman and she was not a professional. But she did it, and then one of the guys said to her, "Well, Lennon does it again." But Lennon didn't have anything to do with it.

> "You know, I don't believe in yesterday.... Do we have to be crucified again because a whole pile of dummies missed it the first time?"

PLAYBOY: Why are you returning to the studio and public life?

LENNON: You breathe in and you breathe out. We feel like doing it and we have something to say. Also, Yoko and I attempted a few times to make music together, but that was a long time ago and people still had the idea that the Beatles were some kind of sacred thing that shouldn't step outside its circle. It was hard for us to work together then. We think either people have forgotten or they have grown up by now, so we can make a second foray into that place where she and I are together, making music—simply that. It's not like I'm some wondrous, mystic prince from the rock-'n'-roll world dabbling in strange music with this exotic, Oriental dragon lady, which was the picture projected by the press before.

PLAYBOY: Some people have accused you of playing to the media. First you become a recluse, then you talk selectively to the press because you have a new album coming out.

LENNON: That's ridiculous. People always said John and Yoko would do anything for the publicity. In the Newsweek article [September 29, 1980], it says the reporter asked us, "Why did you go underground?" Well, she never asked it that way and I didn't go underground. I just stopped talking to the press.

It got to be pretty funny. I was calling myself Greta Hughes or Howard Garbo through that period. But still the gossip items never stopped. We never stopped being in the press, but there seemed to be more written about us when we weren't talking to the press than when we were.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about all the negative press that's been directed through the years at Yoko, your "dragon lady," as you put it?

LENNON: We are both sensitive people and we were hurt a lot by it. I mean, we couldn't understand it. When you're in love, when somebody says something like, "How can you be with that woman?" you say, "What do you mean? I am with this goddess of love, the fulfillment of my whole life. Why are you saying this? Why do you want to throw a rock at her

or punish me for being in love with her?" Our love helped us survive it, but some of it was pretty violent. There were a few times when we nearly went under, but we managed to survive and here we are. [*Looks upward*] Thank you, thank you, thank you.

PLAYBOY: But what about the charge that John Lennon is under Yoko's spell, under her control?

LENNON: Well, that's rubbish, you know. Nobody controls me. I'm uncontrollable. The only one who controls me is me, and that's just barely possible.

PLAYBOY: Still, many people believe it.

LENNON: Listen, if somebody's gonna impress me, whether it be a Maharishi or a Yoko Ono, there comes a point when the emperor has no clothes. There comes a point when I will see. So for all you folks out there who think that I'm having the wool pulled over my eyes, well, that's an insult to me. Not that you think less of Yoko, because that's your problem. What I think of her is what counts! Because—fuck you, brother and sister—you don't know what's happening. I'm not here for you. I'm here for me and her and the baby!

ONO: Of course, it's a total insult to me—

LENNON: Well, you're always insulted, my dear wife. It's natural—

ONO: Why should I bother to control anybody?

LENNON: She doesn't need me.

ONO: I have my own life, you know.

LENNON: She doesn't need a Beatle. Who needs a Beatle?

ONO: Do people think I'm that much of a con? John lasted two months with the Maharishi. Two months. I must be the biggest con in the world, because I've been with him 13 years.

LENNON: But people do say that.

PLAYBOY: That's our point. Why?

LENNON: They want to hold on to something they never had in the first place. Anybody who claims to have some interest in me as an individual artist or even as part of the Beatles has absolutely misunderstood everything I ever said if they can't see why I'm with Yoko. And if they can't see that, they don't see anything. They're just jacking off to—it could be anybody. Mick Jagger or somebody else. Let them go jack off to Mick Jagger, okay? I don't need it.

PLAYBOY: He'll appreciate that.

LENNON: I absolutely don't need it. Let them chase Wings. Just forget about me. If that's what you want, go after Paul or Mick. I ain't here for that. If that's not apparent in my past, I'm saying it in black and green, next to all the tits and asses on page 196. Go play with the other boys. Don't bother me. Go play with the Rolling Wings.

PLAYBOY: Do you—

LENNON: No, wait a minute. Let's stay with this a second; sometimes I can't let go of it. [He is on his feet, climbing up the refrigerator] Nobody ever said anything about Paul's having a spell on me or my having one on Paul! They never thought that was abnormal in those days, two guys together, or four guys together! Why didn't they ever say, "How come those guys don't split up? I mean, what's going on backstage? What is this Paul and John business? How can they be together so long?" We spent more time together in the early days than John and Yoko: the four of us sleeping in the same room, practically in the same bed, in the same truck, living together night and day, eating, shitting and pissing together! All right? Doing everything together! Nobody said a damn thing about being under a spell. Maybe they said we were under the spell of Brian Epstein or George Martin [the Beatles' first manager and producer, respectively] There's always somebody who has to be doing something to you.

"The Beatles don't exist and can never exist again. We are not in our 20s. We cannot be that again, nor can the people who are listening."

You know, they're congratulating the Stones on being together 112 years. Whoooopee! At least Charlie and Bill still got their families. In the 80s, they'll be asking, "Why are those guys still together? Can't they hack it on their own? Why do they have to be surrounded by a gang? Is the little leader scared somebody's gonna knife him in the back?" That's gonna be the question. That's-a-gonna be the question! They're gonna look back at the Beatles and the Stones and all those guys are relics. The days when those bands were just all men will be on the newsreels, you know. They will be showing pictures of the guy with lipstick wriggling his ass and the four guys with the evil black make-up on their eyes trying to look raunchy. That's gonna be the joke in the future, not a couple singing together or living and working together. It's all right when you're 16, 17, 18 to have male companions and idols, okay? It's tribal and it's gang and it's fine. But when it continues and you're still doing it when you're 40, that means you're still 16 in the head.

PLAYBOY: Let's start at the beginning. Tell us the story of how the wondrous mystic prince and the exotic dragon lady met.

LENNON: It was in 1966 in England. I'd been told about this "event"—this Japanese avant-garde artist coming from America.

I was looking around the gallery and I saw this ladder and climbed up and got a look in this spyglass on the top of the ladder—you feel like a fool—and it just said, yes. Now, at the time, all the avant-garde was smash the piano with a hammer and break the sculpture and anti-, anti-, anti-, anti-, anti. It was all boring negative crap, you know. And just that yes made me stay in a gallery full of apples and nails.

There was a sign that said, Hammer a nail in, so I said, "Can I hammer a nail in?" But Yoko said no, because the show wasn't opening until the next day. But the owner came up and whispered to her, "Let him hammer a nail in. You know, he's a millionaire. He might buy it." And so there was this little conference, and finally she said, "Okay, you can hammer a nail in for five shillings." So smartass says, "Well, I'll give you an imaginary five shillings and hammer an imaginary nail in." And that's when we really met. That's when we locked eyes and she got it and I got it and, as they say in all the interviews we do, the rest is history.

PLAYBOY: What happened next?

LENNON: Of course, I was a Beatle, but things had begun to change. In 1966, just before we met, I went to Almería, Spain, to make the movie How I Won the War. It did me a lot of good to get away. I was there six weeks. I wrote "Strawberry Fields Forever" there, by the way. It gave me time to think on my own, away from the others. From then on, I was looking for somewhere to go, but I didn't have the nerve to really step out on the boat by myself and push it off. But when I fell in love with Yoko, I knew, My God, this is different from anything I've ever known. This is something other. This is more than a hit record, more than gold, more than everything. It is indescribable.

PLAYBOY: Were falling in love with Yoko and wanting to leave the Beatles connected?

LENNON: As I said, I had already begun to want to leave, but when I met Yoko is like when you meet your first woman. You leave the guys at the bar. You don't go play football anymore. You don't go play snooker or billiards. Maybe some guys do it on Friday night or something, but once I found the woman, the boys became of no interest whatsoever other than being old school friends. "Those wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine." We got married three years later, in 1969. That was the end of the boys. And it just so happened that the boys were well known and

weren't just local guys at the bar. Everybody got so upset over it. There was a lot of shit thrown at us. A lot of hateful stuff.

ONO: Even now, I just read that Paul said, "I understand that he wants to be with her, but why does he have to be with her all the time?"

LENNON: Yoko, do you still have to carry that cross? That was years ago.

ONO: No, no, no. He said it recently. I mean, what happened with John is like, I sort of went to bed with this guy that I liked and suddenly the next morning, I see these three in-laws, standing there.

LENNON: I've always thought there was this underlying thing in Paul's "Get Back." When we were in the studio recording it, every time he sang the line "Get back to where you once belonged," he'd look at Yoko.

PLAYBOY: Are you kidding?

LENNON: No. But maybe he'll say I'm paranoid.

[*The next portion of the interview took place with Lennon alone.*]

PLAYBOY: This may be the time to talk about those "in-laws," as Yoko put it. John, you've been asked this a thousand times, but why is it so unthinkable that the Beatles might get back together to make some music?

LENNON: Do you want to go back to high school? Why should I go back 10 years to provide an illusion for you that I know does not exist? It cannot exist.

PLAYBOY: Then forget the illusion. What about just to make some great music again? Do you acknowledge that the Beatles made great music?

LENNON: Why should the Beatles give more? Didn't they give everything on God's earth for 10 years? Didn't they give themselves? You're like the typical sort of love-hate fan who says, "Thank you for everything you did for us in the '60s—would you just give me another shot? Just one more miracle?"

PLAYBOY: We're not talking about miracles—just good music.

LENNON: When Rodgers worked with Hart and then worked with Hammerstein, do you think he should have stayed with one instead of working with the other? Should Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis have stayed together because I used to like them together? What is this game of doing things because other people want it? The whole Beatle idea was to do what you want, right? To take your own responsibility.

> "Men never developed the inner wisdom; they didn't have time. So most men do rely on women's inner wisdom, whether they express that or not."

PLAYBOY: All right, but get back to the music itself. You don't agree that the Beatles created the best rock 'n' roll that's been produced?

LENNON: I don't. The Beatles, you see—I'm too involved in them artistically. I cannot see them objectively. I cannot listen to them objectively. I'm dissatisfied with every record the Beatles ever fucking made. There ain't one of them I wouldn't remake—including all the Beatles records and all my individual ones. So I cannot possibly give you an assessment of what the Beatles are.

When I was a Beatle, I thought we were the best fucking group in the goddamned world. And believing that is what made us what were were—whether we call it the best rock-'n'-roll group or the best pop group or whatever. But you play me those tracks today and I want to remake every damn one of them. There's not a single one . . . I heard "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" on the radio last night. It's abysmal, you know. The track is just terrible. I mean, it's great, but it wasn't made right, know what I mean? But that's the artistic trip, isn't it? That's why you keep going. But to get back to your original question about the Beatles and their music, the answer is that we did some good stuff and we did some bad stuff.

PLAYBOY: Many people feel that none of the songs Paul has done alone match the songs he did as a Beatle. Do you honestly feel that any of your songs—on the Plastic Ono Band records—will have the lasting imprint of "Eleanor Rigby" or "Strawberry Fields"?

LENNON: "Imagine," "Love" and those Plastic Ono Band songs stand up to any song that was written when I was a Beatle. Now, it may take you 20 or 30 years to appreciate that, but the fact is, if you check those songs out, you will see that it is as good as any fucking stuff that was ever done.

PLAYBOY: It seems as if you're trying to say to the world, "We were just a good band making some good music," while a lot of the rest of the world is saying, "It wasn't just some good music, it was the best."

LENNON: Well, if it was the best, so what?

PLAYBOY: So—

LENNON: It can never be again! Everyone always talks about a good thing coming to an end, as if life was over. But I'll be 40 when this interview comes out. Paul is 38. Elton John, Bob Dylan—we're all relatively young people. The game isn't over yet. Everyone talks in terms of the last record or the last Beatle concert—but, God willing, there are another 40 years of productivity to go. I'm not judging whether "I Am the Walrus" is better or worse than "Imagine." It is for others to judge. I am doing it. I do. I don't stand back and judge—I do.

PLAYBOY: You keep saying you don't want to go back 10 years, that too much has changed. Don't you ever feel it would be interesting—never mind cosmic, just interesting—to get together, with all your new experiences, and cross your talents?

LENNON: Wouldn't it be interesting to take Elvis back to his Sun Records period? I don't know. But I'm content to listen to his Sun Records. I don't want to dig him up out of the grave. The Beatles don't exist and can never exist again. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Richard Starkey could put on a concert—but it can never be the Beatles singing "Strawberry Fields" or "I Am the Walrus" again, because we are not in our 20s. We cannot be that again, nor can the people who are listening.

PLAYBOY: But aren't you the one who is making it too important? What if it were just nostalgic fun? A high school reunion?

LENNON: I never went to high school reunions. My thing is, Out of sight, out of mind. That's my attitude toward life. So I don't have any romanticism about any part of my past. I think of it only inasmuch as it gave me pleasure or helped me grow psychologically. That is the only thing that interests me about yesterday. I don't believe in yesterday, by the way. You know I don't believe in yesterday. I am only interested in what I am doing now.

PLAYBOY: What about the people of your generation, the ones who feel a certain kind of music—and spirit—died when the Beatles broke up?

LENNON: If they didn't understand the Beatles and the '60s then, what the fuck could we do for them now? Do we have to divide the fish and the loaves for the multitudes again? Do we have to get crucified again? Do we have to do the walking on water again because a whole pile of dummies didn't see it the first time, or didn't believe it when they saw it? You know, that's what they're asking: "Get off the cross. I didn't understand the first bit yet. Can you do that again?" No way. You can never go home. It doesn't exist.

PLAYBOY: Do you find that the clamor for a Beatles reunion has died down?

LENNON: Well, I heard some Beatles stuff on the radio the other day and I heard "Green Onion"—no, "Glass Onion." I don't even know my

own songs' I listened to it because it was a rare track—

PLAYBOY: That was the one that contributed to the "Paul McCartney is dead" uproar because of the lyric "The walrus is Paul."

LENNON: Yeah. That line was a joke, you know. That line was put in partly because I was feeling guilty because I was with Yoko, and I knew I was finally high and dry. In a perverse way, I was sort of saying to Paul, "Here, have this crumb, have this illusion, have this stroke—because I'm leaving you." Anyway, it's a song they don't usually play. When a radio station has a Beatles weekend, they usually play the same 10 songs—"A Hard Day's Night," "Help!," "Yesterday," "Something," "Let It Be"—you know, there's all that wealth of material, but we hear only 10 songs. So the deejay says, "I want to thank John, Paul, George and Ringo for not getting back together and spoiling a good thing." I thought it was a good sign. Maybe people are catching on.

PLAYBOY: Aside from the millions you've been offered for a reunion concert, how did you feel about producer Lorne Michaels's generous offer of $55,700.00 for appearing together on Saturday Night Live a few years ago?

LENNON: Oh, yeah. Paul and I were together watching that show. He was visiting us at our place in the Dakota. We were watching it and almost went down to the studio, just as a gag. We nearly got into a cab, but we were actually too tired.

PLAYBOY: How did you and Paul happen to be watching TV together?

LENNON: That was a period when Paul just kept turning up at our door with a guitar. I would let him in, but finally I said to him, "Please call before you come over. It's not 1956 and turning up at the door isn't the same anymore. You know, just give me a ring." He was upset by that, but I didn't mean it badly. I just meant that I was taking care of a baby all day and some guy turns up at the door.... But, anyway, back on that night, he and Linda walked in and he and I were just sitting there, watching the show, and we went, "Ha-ha, wouldn't it be funny if we went down?" but we didn't.

PLAYBOY: Was that the last time you saw Paul?

LENNON: Yes, but I didn't mean it like that.

PLAYBOY: We're asking because there's always a lot of speculation about whether the Fab Four are dreaded enemies or the best of friends.

LENNON: We're neither. I haven't seen any of the Beatles for I don't know how much time. Somebody asked me what I thought of Paul's last album and I made some remark like, I thought he was depressed and sad. But then I realized I hadn't listened to the whole damn thing. I heard one track—the hit "Coming Up," which I thought was a good piece of work. Then I heard something else that sounded like he was depressed. But I don't follow their work. I don't follow Wings, you know. I don't give a shit what Wings is doing, or what George's new album is doing, or what Ringo is doing. I'm not interested, no more than I am in what Elton John or Bob Dylan is doing. It's not callousness, it's just that I'm too busy living my own life to be following what other people are doing, whether they're the Beatles or guys I went to college with or people I had intense relationships with before I met the Beatles.

PLAYBOY: Besides "Coming Up," what do you think of Paul's work since he left the Beatles?

LENNON: I kind of admire the way Paul started back from scratch, forming a new band and playing in small dance halls, because that's what he wanted to do with the Beatles—he wanted us to go back to the dance halls and experience that again. But I didn't. That was one of the problems, in a way, that he wanted to relive it all or something—I don't know what it was. But I kind of admire the way he got off his pedestal—now he's back on it again, but I mean, he did what he wanted to do. That's fine, but it's just not what I wanted to do.

PLAYBOY: What about the music?

LENNON: "The Long and Winding Road" was the last gasp from him. Although I really haven't listened.

PLAYBOY: You say you haven't listened to Paul's work and haven't really talked to him since that night in your apartment—

LENNON: Really talked to him, no, that's the operative word. I haven't really talked to him in 10 years. Because I haven't spent time with him. I've been doing other things and so has he. You know, he's got 25 kids and about 20 million records out—how can he spend time talking? He's always working.

PLAYBOY: Then let's talk about the work you did together. Generally speaking, what did each of you contribute to the Lennon-McCartney songwriting team?

LENNON: Well, you could say that he provided a lightness, an optimism, while I would always go for the sadness, the discords, a certain bluesy edge. There was a period when I thought I didn't write melodies, that Paul wrote those and I just wrote straight, shouting rock 'n' roll. But, of course, when I think of some of my own songs—"In My Life"—or some of the early stuff—"This Boy"—I was writing melody with the best of them. Paul had a lot of training, could play a lot of instruments. He'd say, "Well, why don't you change that there? You've done that note 50 times in the song." You know, I'll grab a note and ram it home. Then again, I'd be the one to figure out where to go with a song—a story that Paul would start. In a lot of the songs, my stuff is the "middle eight," the bridge.

> "People around John saw me as a terrible threat. I mean, I heard there were plans to kill me. Not the Beatles, but the people around them."

PLAYBOY: For example?

LENNON: Take "Michelle." Paul and I were staying somewhere, and he walked in and hummed the first few bars, with the words, you know [*sings verse of 'Michelle'*], and he says, "Where do I go from here?" I'd been listening to blues singer Nina Simone, who did something like "I love you!" in one of her songs and that made me think of the middle eight for "Michelle" [*sings*]. "I love you, I love you, I l-o-ove you...."

PLAYBOY: What was the difference in terms of lyrics?

LENNON: I always had an easier time with lyrics, though Paul is quite a capable lyricist who doesn't think he is. So he doesn't go for it. Rather than face the problem, he would avoid it. "Hey Jude" is a damn good set of lyrics. I made no contribution to the lyrics there. And a couple of lines he has come up with show indications of a good lyricist. But he just hasn't taken it anywhere. Still, in the early days, we didn't care about lyrics as long as the song had some vague theme—she loves you, he loves him, they all love each other. It was the hook, line and sound we were going for. That's still my attitude, but I can't leave lyrics alone. I have to make them make sense apart from the songs.

PLAYBOY: What's an example of a lyric you and Paul worked on together?

LENNON: In "We Can Work It Out," Paul did the first half, I did the middle eight. But you've got Paul writing, "We can work it out. We can work it out"—real optimistic, y' know, and me, impatient. "Life is very short and there's no time. For fussing and fighting, my friend."

PLAYBOY: Paul tells the story and John philosophizes.

LENNON: Sure. Well, I was always like that, you know. I was like that

before the Beatles and after the Beatles. I always asked why people did things and why society was like it was. I didn't just accept it for what it was apparently doing. I always looked below the surface.

PLAYBOY: When you talk about working together on a single lyric like "We Can Work It Out," it suggests that you and Paul worked a lot more closely than you've admitted in the past. Haven't you said that you wrote most of your songs separately, despite putting both of your names on them?

LENNON: Yeah, I was lying. [Laughs] It was when I felt resentful, so I felt that we did everything apart. But, actually, a lot of the songs we did eyeball to eyeball.

PLAYBOY: But many of them were done apart, weren't they?

LENNON: Yeah. Sgt. Pepper was Paul's idea, and I remember he worked on it a lot and suddenly called me to go into the studio, said it was time to write some songs. On Pepper, under the pressure of only 10 days, I managed to come up with "Lucy in the Sky" and "A Day in the Life." We weren't communicating enough, you see. And later on, that's why I got resentful about all that stuff. But now I understand that it was just the same competitive game going on.

PLAYBOY: But the competitive game was good for you, wasn't it?

LENNON: In the early days. We'd make a record in 12 hours or something; they would want a single every three months and we'd have to write it in a hotel room or in a van. So the cooperation was functional as well as musical.

PLAYBOY: Don't you think that cooperation, that magic between you, is something you've missed in your work since?

LENNON: I never actually felt a loss. I don't want it to sound negative, like I didn't need Paul, because when he was there, obviously, it worked. But I can't—it's easier to say what I gave to him than what he gave to me. And he'd say the same.

PLAYBOY: Just a quick aside, but while we're on the subject of lyrics and your resentment of Paul, what made you write "How Do You Sleep?," which contains lyrics such as, "Those freaks was right when they said you was dead" and "The only thing you done was yesterday. And since you've gone, you're just another day"?

LENNON: [*Smiles*] You know, I wasn't really feeling that vicious at the time. But I was using my resentment toward Paul to create a song, let's put it that way. He saw that it pointedly refers to him, and people kept hounding him about it. But, you know, there were a few digs on his album before mine. He's so obscure other people didn't notice them, but I heard them. I thought, Well, I'm not obscure, I just get right down to the nitty-gritty. So he'd done it his way and I did it mine. But as to the line you quoted, yeah, I think Paul died creatively, in a way.

PLAYBOY: That's what we were getting at: You say that what you've done since the Beatles stands up well, but isn't it possible that with all of you, it's been a case of the creative whole being greater than the parts?

LENNON: I don't know whether this will gel for you. When the Beatles played in America for the first time, they played pure craftsmanship. Meaning they were already old hands. The jism had gone out of the performances a long time ago. In the same respect, the songwriting creativity had left Paul and me in the mid-'60s. When we wrote together in the early days, it was like the beginning of a relationship. Lots of energy. In the Sgt. Pepper—Abbey Road period, the relationship had matured. Maybe had we gone on together, more interesting things would have come, but it couldn't have been the same.

PLAYBOY: Let's move on to Ringo. What's your opinion of him musically?

LENNON: Ringo was a star in his own right in Liverpool before we even met. He was a professional drummer who sang and performed and had Ringo Starr-time and he was in one of the top groups in Britain but especially in Liverpool before we even had a drummer. So Ringo's talent would have come out one way or the other as something or other. I don't know what he would have ended up as, but whatever that spark is in Ringo that we all know but can't put our finger on—whether it is acting, drumming or singing I don't know—there is something in him that is projectable and he would have surfaced with or without the Beatles. Ringo is a damn good drummer. He is not technically good, but I think Ringo's drumming is underrated the same way Paul's bass playing is underrated. Paul was one of the most innovative bass players ever. And half the stuff that is going on now is directly ripped off from his Beatles period. He is an egomaniac about everything else about himself, but his bass playing he was always a bit coy about. I think Paul and Ringo stand up with any of the rock musicians. Not technically great—none of us are technical musicians. None of us could read music. None of us can write it. But as pure musicians, as inspired humans to make the noise, they are as good as anybody.

PLAYBOY: How about George's solo music?

LENNON: I think All Things Must Pass was all right. It just went on too long.

> "I say to John, 'I carried the baby nine months and that's enough, so you take care of it afterward.' I believe children belong to the society."

PLAYBOY: How did you feel about the lawsuit George lost that claimed the music to "My Sweet Lord" is a rip-off of the Shirelles' hit "He's So Fine"?

LENNON: Well, he walked right into it. He knew what he was doing.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying he consciously plagiarized the song?

LENNON: He must have known, you know. He's smarter than that. It's irrelevant, actually—only on a monetary level does it matter. He could have changed a couple of bars in that song and nobody could ever have touched him, but he just let it go and paid the price. Maybe he thought God would just sort of let him off. [*At press time, the court has found Harrison guilty of "subconscious" plagiarism but has not yet ruled on damages.*]

PLAYBOY: You actually haven't mentioned George much in this interview.

LENNON: Well, I was hurt by George's book, I, Me, Mine—so this message will go to him. He put a book out privately on his life that, by glaring omission, says that my influence on his life is absolutely zilch and nil. In his book, which is purportedly this clarity of vision of his influence on each song he wrote, he remembers every two-bit sax player or guitarist he met in subsequent years. I'm not in the book.

PLAYBOY: Why?

LENNON: Because George's relationship with me was one of young follower and older guy. He's three or four years younger than me. It's a love-hate relationship and I think George still bears resentment toward me for being a daddy who left home. He would not agree with this, but that's my feeling about it. I was just hurt. I was just left out, as if I didn't exist. I don't want to be that egomaniacal, but he was like a disciple of mine when we started. I was already an art student when Paul and George were still in grammar school [*equivalent to high school in the U.S.*]. There is a vast difference between being in high school and being in college and I was already in college and already had sexual relationships, already drank and did a lot of things like that. When George was a kid, he used to follow me and my first girlfriend, Cynthia—who became my wife—around. We'd come out of art school and he'd be hovering around like those kids at the gate of the Dakota now.

I remember the day he called to ask for help on "Taxman," one of his bigger songs. I threw in a few one-liners to help the song along, because that's what he asked for. He came to me because he couldn't go to Paul, because Paul wouldn't have helped him at that period. I didn't want to do it. I thought, Oh, no, don't tell me I have to work on George's stuff. It's enough doing my own and Paul's. But because I loved him and I didn't want to hurt him when he called me that afternoon and said, "Will you help me with this song?" I just sort of bit my tongue and said okay. It had been John and Paul so long, he'd been left out because he hadn't been a songwriter up until then. As a singer, we allowed him only one track on each album. If you listen to the Beatles' first albums, the English versions, he gets a single track. The songs he and Ringo sang at first were the songs that used to be part of my repertoire in the dance halls. I used to pick songs for them from my repertoire—the easier ones to sing. So I am slightly resentful of George's book. But don't get me wrong. I still love those guys. The Beatles are over, but John, Paul, George and Ringo go on.

PLAYBOY: Didn't all four Beatles work on a song you wrote for Ringo in 1973?

LENNON: "I'm the Greatest." It was the Muhammad Ali line, of course. It was perfect for Ringo to sing. If I said, "I'm the greatest," they'd all take it so seriously. No one would get upset with Ringo singing it.

PLAYBOY: Did you enjoy playing with George and Ringo again?

LENNON: Yeah, except when George and Billy Preston started saying, "Let's form a group. Let's form a group." I was embarrassed when George kept asking me. He was just enjoying the session and the spirit was very good, but I was with Yoko, you know. We took time out from what we were doing. The very fact that they would imagine I would form a male group without Yoko! It was still in their minds.

PLAYBOY: Just to finish your favorite subject, what about the suggestion that the four of you put aside your personal feelings and regroup to give a mammoth concert for charity, some sort of giant benefit?

LENNON: I don't want to have anything to do with benefits. I have been benefited to death.

PLAYBOY: Why?

LENNON: Because they're always rip-offs. I haven't performed for personal gain since 1966, when the Beatles last performed. Every concert since then, Yoko and I did for specific charities, except for a Toronto thing that was a rock-'n'-roll revival. Every one of them was a mess or a rip-off. So now we give money to who we want. You've heard of tithing?

PLAYBOY: That's when you give away a fixed percentage of your income.

LENNON: Right. I am just going to do it privately. I am not going to get locked into that business of saving the world onstage. The show is always a mess and the artist always comes off badly.

PLAYBOY: What about the Bangladesh concert, in which George and other people such as Dylan performed?

LENNON: Bangladesh was caca.

PLAYBOY: You mean because of all the questions that were raised about where the money went?

LENNON: Yeah, right. I can't even talk about it, because it's still a problem. You'll have to check with Mother [Yoko], because she knows the ins and outs of it. I don't. But it's all a rip-off. So forget about it. All of you who are reading this, don't bother sending me all that garbage about, "Just come and save the Indians, come and save the blacks, come and save the war veterans." Anybody I want to save will be helped through our tithing, which is 10 percent of whatever we earn.

PLAYBOY: But that doesn't compare with what one promoter, Sid Bernstein, said you could raise by giving a world-wide televised concert—playing separately, as individuals or together as the Beatles. He estimated you could raise over R3,500.00 million in one day.

LENNON: That was a commercial for Sid Bernstein written with Jewish schmaltz and showbiz and tears, dropping on one knee. It was Al Jolson. Okay. So I don't buy that. Okay.

PLAYBOY: But the fact is, R3,500.00 million to a poverty-stricken country in South America—

LENNON: Where do people get off saying the Beatles should give R3,500.00 million to South America? You know, America has poured billions into places like that. It doesn't mean a damn thing. After they've eaten that meal, then what? It lasts for only a day. After the R3,500.00 million is gone, then what? It goes round and round in circles. You can pour money in forever. After Peru, then Harlem, then Britain. There is no one concert. We would have to dedicate the rest of our lives to one world concert tour, and I'm not ready for it. Not in this lifetime, anyway.

[*Ono rejoins the conversation.*]

PLAYBOY: On the subject of your own wealth, the New York Post recently said you admitted to being worth over R2,650.00 million and—

LENNON: We never admitted anything.

PLAYBOY: The Post said you had.

LENNON: What the Post says—okay, so we are rich. So what?

PLAYBOY: The question is, How does that jibe with your political philosophies? You're supposed to be socialists, aren't you?

LENNON: In England, there are only two things to be, basically. You are either for the labor movement or for the capitalist movement. Either you become a right-wing Archie Bunker if you are in the class I am in, or you become an instinctive socialist, which I was. That meant I think people should get their false teeth and their health looked after, all the rest of it. But apart from that, I worked for money and I wanted to be rich. So what the hell—if that's a paradox, then I'm a socialist. But I am not anything. What I used to be is guilty about money. That's why I lost it, either by giving it away or by allowing myself to be screwed by so-called managers.

"This Beatles talk bores me to death."

PLAYBOY: Whatever your politics, you've played the capitalist game very well, parlaying your Beatles royalties into real estate, livestock—

ONO: There is no denying that we are still living in the capitalist world. I think that in order to survive and to change the world, you have to take care of yourself first. You have to survive yourself. I used to say to myself, I am the only socialist living here. [Laughs] I don't have a penny. It is all John's, so I'm clean. But I was using his money and I had to face that hypocrisy. I used to think that money was obscene, that the artists didn't have to think about money. But to change society, there are two ways to go, through violence or the power of money within the system. A lot of people in the '60s went underground and were involved in bombings and other violence. But that is not the way, definitely not for me. So to change the system—even if you are going to become a mayor or something—you need money.

PLAYBOY: To what extent do you play the game without getting caught up in it—money for the sake of money, in other words?

ONO: There is a limit. It would probably be parallel to our level of security. Do you know what I mean? I mean the emotional-security level as well.

PLAYBOY: Has it reached that level yet?

ONO: No, not yet. I don't know. It might have.

PLAYBOY: You mean with R2,650.00 million? Is that an accurate estimate?

ONO: I don't know what we have. It becomes so complex that you need to have 10 accountants working for two years to find out what you have. But let's say that we feel more comfortable now.

PLAYBOY: How have you chosen to invest your money?

ONO: To make money, you have to spend money. But if you are going to make money, you have to make it with love. I love Egyptian art. I make sure to get all the Egyptian things, not for their value but for their magic power. Each piece has a certain magic power. Also with houses. I just buy

ones we love, not the ones that people say are good investments.

PLAYBOY: The papers have made it sound like you are buying up the Atlantic Seaboard.

ONO: If you saw the houses, you would understand. They have become a good investment, but they are not an investment unless you sell them. We don't intend to sell. Each house is like a historic landmark and they're very beautiful.

PLAYBOY: Do you actually use all the properties?

ONO: Most people have the park to go to and run in—the park is a huge place—but John and I were never able to go to the park together. So we have to create our own parks, you know.

PLAYBOY: We heard that you own R1,050 00 million worth of dairy cows. Can that be true?

ONO: I don't know. I'm not a calculator. I'm not going by figures. I'm going by excellence of things.

LENNON: Sean and I were away for a weekend and Yoko came over to sell this cow and I was joking about it. We hadn't seen her for days, she spent all her time on it. But then I read the paper that said she sold it for a quarter of a million dollars. Only Yoko could sell a cow for that much. [*Laughter*]

PLAYBOY: For an artist, your business sense seems remarkable.

ONO: I was doing it just as a chess game. I love chess. I do everything like it's a chess game. Not on a Monopoly level—that's a bit more realistic. Chess is more conceptual.

PLAYBOY: John, do you really need all those houses around the country?

LENNON: They're good business.

PLAYBOY: Why does anyone need R2,650 00 million? Couldn't you be perfectly content with R1,750 00 million? Or R18 00 million?

LENNON: What would you suggest I do? Give everything away and walk the streets? The Buddhist says, "Get rid of the possessions of the mind." Walking away from all the money would not accomplish that. It's like the Beatles. I couldn't walk away from the Beatles. That's one possession that's still tagging along, right? If I walk away from one house or 400 houses, I'm not gonna escape it.

PLAYBOY: How do you escape it?

LENNON: It takes time to get rid of all this garbage that I've been carrying around that was influencing the way I thought and the way I lived. It had a lot to do with Yoko, showing me that I was still possessed. I left physically when I fell in love with Yoko, but mentally it took the last 10 years of struggling. I learned everything from her.

PLAYBOY: You make it sound like a teacher-pupil relationship.

LENNON: It is a teacher-pupil relationship. That's what people don't understand. She's the teacher and I'm the pupil. I'm the famous one, the one who's supposed to know everything, but she's my teacher. She's taught me everything I fucking know. She was there when I was nowhere, when I was the nowhere man. She's my Don Juan [a reference to Carlos Castaneda's Yaqui Indian teacher]. That's what people don't understand. I'm married to fucking Don Juan, that's the hardship of it. Don Juan doesn't have to laugh, Don Juan doesn't have to be charming; Don Juan just is. And what goes on around Don Juan is irrelevant to Don Juan.

PLAYBOY: Yoko, how do you feel about being John's teacher?

ONO: Well, he had a lot of experience before he met me, the kind of experience I never had, so I learned a lot from him, too. It's both ways. Maybe it's that I have strength, a feminine strength. Because women develop it—in a relationship, I think women really have the inner wisdom and they're carrying that while men have sort of the wisdom to cope with society, since they created it. Men never developed the inner wisdom, they didn't have time. So most men do rely on women's inner wisdom, whether they express that or not.

PLAYBOY: Is Yoko John's guru?

LENNON: No, a Don Juan doesn't have a following. A Don Juan isn't in the newspaper and doesn't have disciples and doesn't proselytize.

PLAYBOY: How has she taught you?

LENNON: When Don Juan said—when Don Ono said, "Get out! Because you're not getting it," well, it was like being sent into the desert. And the reason she wouldn't let me back in was because I wasn't ready to come back in. I had to settle things within myself. When I was ready to come back in, she let me back in. And that's what I'm living with.

PLAYBOY: You're talking about your separation.

LENNON: Yes. We were separated in the early '70s. She kicked me out. Suddenly, I was on a raft alone in the middle of the universe.

PLAYBOY: What happened?

LENNON: Well, at first, I thought, Whoopee, whoopee! You know, bachelor life! Whoopee! And then I woke up one day and I thought, What is this? I want to go home! But she wouldn't let me come home. That's why it was 18 months apart instead of six months. We were talking all the time on the phone and I would say, "I don't like this, I'm getting in trouble and I'd like to come home, please." And she would say, "You're not ready to come home." So what do you say? Okay, back to the bottle.

PLAYBOY: What did she mean, you weren't ready?

LENNON: She has her ways. Whether they be mystical or practical. When she said it's not ready, it ain't ready.

PLAYBOY: Back to the bottle?

LENNON: I was just trying to hide what I felt in the bottle. I was just insane. It was the lost weekend that lasted 18 months. I've never drunk so much in my life. I tried to drown myself in the bottle and I was with the heaviest drinkers in the business.

PLAYBOY: Such as?

LENNON: Such as Harry Nilsson, Bobby Keyes, Keith Moon. We couldn't pull ourselves out. We were trying to kill ourselves. I think Harry might still be trying, poor bugger—God bless you, Harry, wherever you are—but, Jesus, you know, I had to get away from that, because somebody was going to die. Well, Keith did. It was like, who's going to die first? Unfortunately, Keith was the one.

PLAYBOY: Why the self-destruction?

LENNON: For me, it was because of being apart. I couldn't stand it. They had their own reasons, and it was. Let's all drown ourselves together. From where I was sitting, it looked like that. Let's kill ourselves but do it like Errol Flynn, you know, the macho, male way. It's embarrassing for me to think about that period, because I made a big fool of myself—but maybe it was a good lesson for me.

I wrote "Nobody Loves You When You're Down and Out" during that time. That's how I felt. It exactly expresses the whole period. For some reason, I always imagined Sinatra singing that one. I don't know why. It's kind of a Sinatra-esque song, really. He would do a perfect job with it. Are you listening, Frank? You need a song that isn't a piece of nothing. Here's the one for you, the horn arrangement and everything's made for you. But don't ask me to produce it.

PLAYBOY: That must have been the time the papers came out with reports about Lennon running around town with a Tampax on his head.

LENNON: The stories were all so exaggerated, but.... We were all in a restaurant, drinking, not eating, as usual at those gatherings, and I happened to go take a pee and there was a brand-new fresh Kotex, not Tampax, on the toilet. You know the old trick where you put a penny on your forehead and it sticks? I was a little high and I just picked it up and slapped it on and it stayed, you see. I walked out of the bathroom and I had a Kotex on my head. Big deal. Everybody went "Ha-ha-ha" and it fell off, but the press blew it up.

PLAYBOY: Why did you kick John out, Yoko?

ONO: There were many things. I'm what I call a "moving on" kind of girl, there's a song on our new album about it. Rather than deal with problems in relationships, I've always moved on. That's why I'm one of the very few survivors as a woman, you know. Women tend to be more into men usually, but I wasn't....

__ **LENNON:** Yoko looks upon men as assistants—of varying degrees of intimacy, but basically assistants. And this one's going to take a pee. [*He exits*]

ONO: I have no comment on that. But when I met John, women to him were basically people around who were serving him. He had to open himself up and face me—and I had to see what he was going through. But I thought I had to move on again, because I was suffering being with John.

PLAYBOY: Why?

ONO: The pressure from the public, being the one who broke up the Beatles and who made it impossible for them to get back together. My artwork suffered too. I thought I wanted to be free from being Mrs. Lennon, so I thought it would be a good idea for him to go to L.A. and leave me alone for a while. I had put up with it for many years. Even early on, when John was a Beatle, we stayed in a room and John and I were in bed and the door was closed and all that, but we didn't lock the door and one of the Beatle assistants just walked in and talked to him as if I weren't there. It was mind-blowing. I was invisible. The people around John saw me as a terrible threat. I mean, I heard there were plans to kill me. Not the Beatles but the people around them.

PLAYBOY: How did that news affect you?

ONO: The society doesn't understand that the woman can be castrated too. I felt castrated. Before, I was doing all right, thank you. My work might not have been selling much, I might have been poorer, but I had my pride. But the most humiliating thing is to be looked at as a parasite.

[*Lennon rejoins the conversation.*]

LENNON: When Yoko and I started doing stuff together, we would hold press conferences and announce our whatevers—we're going to wear bags or whatever. And before this one press conference, one Beatle assistant in the upper echelon of Beatle assistants leaned over to Yoko and said, "You know, you don't have to work. You've got enough money, now that you're Mrs. Lennon." And when she complained to me about it, I couldn't understand what she was talking about. "But this guy," I'd say. "He's just good old Charley, or whatever. He's been with us 20 years." The same kind of thing happened in the studio. She would say to an engineer, "I'd like a little more treble, a little more bass," or "There's too much of whatever you're putting on," and they'd look at me and say, "What did you say, John?" Those days I didn't even notice it myself. Now I know what she's talking about. In Japan, when I ask for a cup of tea in Japanese, they look at Yoko and ask, "He wants a cup of tea?" in Japanese.

ONO: So a good few years of that kind of thing emasculates you. I had always been more macho than most guys I was with, in a sense. I had always been the breadwinner, because I always wanted to have the freedom and the control. Suddenly, I'm with somebody I can't possibly compete with on a level of earnings. Finally, I couldn't take it—or I decided not to take it any longer. I would have had the same difficulty even if I hadn't gotten involved with, ah—

LENNON: John. John is the name.

ONO: With John. But John wasn't just John. He was also his group and the people around them. When I say John, it's not just John.

LENNON: That's John. J-O-H-N. From Jonan, I believe.

PLAYBOY: So you made him leave?

ONO: Yes.

LENNON: She don't suffer fools gladly, even if she's married to him.

PLAYBOY: How did you finally get back together?

ONO: It slowly started to dawn on me that John was not the trouble at all. John was a fine person. It was society that had become too much. We laugh about it now, but we started dating again. I wanted to be sure. I'm thankful to John's intelligence—

LENNON: Now, get that, editors—you got that word?

ONO: That he was intelligent enough to know this was the only way that we could save our marriage, not because we didn't love each other but because it was getting too much for me. Nothing would have changed if I had come back as Mrs. Lennon again.

PLAYBOY: What did change?

ONO: It was good for me to do the business and regain my pride about what I could do. And it was good to know what he needed, the role reversal that was so good for him.

LENNON: And we learned that it's better for the family if we are both working for the family, she doing the business and me playing mother and wife. We reordered our priorities. The number-one priority is her and the family. Everything else revolves around that.

ONO: It's a hard realization. These days, the society prefers single people. The encouragements are to divorce or separate or be single or gay—whatever. Corporations want singles—they work harder if they don't have family ties. They don't have to worry about being home in the evenings or on the weekends. There's not much room for emotions about family or personal relationships. You know, the whole thing they say to women approaching 30 that if you don't have a baby in the next few years, you're going to be in trouble, you'll never be a mother, so you'll never be fulfilled in that way and—

LENNON: Only Yoko was 73 when she had Sean. [*Laughter*]

There was something wrong with me, I thought, because I seemed to see things other people didn't see. I thought I was crazy or an egomaniac for claiming to see things other people didn't see.

ONO: So instead of the society discouraging children, since they are important for society, it should encourage them. It's the responsibility of everybody. But it is hard. A woman has to deny what she has, her womb, if she wants to make it. It seems that only the privileged classes can have families. Nowadays, maybe it's only the McCartneys and the Lennons or something.

LENNON: Everybody else becomes a worker-consumer.

ONO: And then Big Brother will decide—I hate to use the term Big Brother ...

LENNON: Too late. They've got it on tape. [Laughs]

ONO: But, finally, the society—

LENNON: Big Sister—wait till she comes!

ONO: The society will do away with the roles of men and women. Babies will be born in test tubes and incubators. ...

LENNON: Then it's Aldous Huxley.

ONO: But we don't have to go that way. We don't have to deny any of our organs, you know.

LENNON: Some of my best friends are organs—

ONO: The new album—

LENNON: Back to the album, very good.

ONO: The album fights these things. The messages are sort of old-fashioned—family, relationships, children.

PLAYBOY: The album obviously reflects your new priorities. How have things gone for you since you made that decision?

LENNON: We got back together, decided this was our life, that having a baby was important to us and that anything else was subsidiary to that. We worked hard for that child. We went through all hell trying to have a baby, through many miscarriages and other problems. He is what they call a love child in truth. Doctors told us we could never have a child. We almost gave up. "Well, that's it, then, we can't have one...." We were told something was wrong with my sperm, that I abused myself so much in my youth that there was no chance. Yoko was 43, and so they said, no way. She has had too many miscarriages and when she was a young girl, there were no pills, so there were lots of abortions and miscarriages; her stomach must be like Kew Gardens in London. No way. But this Chinese acupuncturist in San Francisco said, "You behave yourself. No drugs, eat well, no drink. You have child in 18 months." And we said, "But the English doctors said ..." He said, "Forget what they said. You have child." We had Sean and sent the acupuncturist a Polaroid of him just before he died, God rest his soul.

PLAYBOY: Were there any problems because of Yoko's age?

LENNON: Not because of her age but because of a screw-up in the hospital and the fucking price of fame. Somebody had made a transfusion of the wrong blood type into Yoko. I was there when it happened, and she starts to go rigid, and then shake, from the pain and the trauma. I run up to this nurse and say, "Go get the doctor!" I'm holding on tight to Yoko while this guy gets to the hospital room. He walks in, hardly notices that

Yoko is going through fucking convulsions, goes straight for me, smiles, shakes my hand and says, "I've always wanted to meet you, Mr. Lennon, I always enjoyed your music." I start screaming: "My wife's dying and you wanna talk about my music!" Christ!

PLAYBOY: Now that Sean is almost five, is he conscious of the fact that his father was a Beatle or have you protected him from your fame?

LENNON: I haven't said anything. Beatles were never mentioned to him. There was no reason to mention it; we never played Beatle records around the house, unlike the story that went around that I was sitting in the kitchen for the past five years, playing Beatle records and reliving my past like some kind of Howard Hughes. He did see Yellow Submarine at a friend's, so I had to explain what a cartoon of me was doing in a movie.

PLAYBOY: Does he have an awareness of the Beatles?

LENNON: He doesn't differentiate between the Beatles and Daddy and Mommy. He thinks Yoko was a Beatle too. I don't have Beatle records on the jukebox he listens to. He's more exposed to early rock 'n' roll. He's into "Hound Dog." He thinks it's about hunting.

Sean's not going to public school, by the way. We feel he can learn the three Rs when he wants to—or when the law says he has to, I suppose. I'm not going to fight it. Otherwise, there's no reason for him to be learning to sit still. I can't see; my reason for it. Sean now has plenty of child companionship, which everybody says is important, but he also is with adults a lot. He's adjusted to both.

The reason why kids are crazy is because nobody can face the responsibility of bringing them up. Everybody's too scared to deal with children all the time, so we reject them and send them away and torture them. The ones who survive are the conformists—their bodies are cut to the size of the suits—the ones we label good. The ones who don't fit the suits either are put in mental homes or become artists.

PLAYBOY: Your son, Julian, from your first marriage must be in his teens. Have you seen him over the years?

LENNON: Well, Cyn got possession, or whatever you call it. I got rights to see him on his holidays and all that business, and at least there's an open line still going. It's not the best relationship between father and son, but it is there. He's 17 now. Julian and I will have a relationship in the future. Over the years, he's been able to see through the Beatle image and to see through the image that his mother will have given him, subconsciously or consciously. He's interested in girls and autobikes now. I'm just sort of a figure in the sky, but he's obliged to communicate with me, even when he probably doesn't want to.

PLAYBOY: You're being very honest about your feelings toward him to the point of saying that Sean is your first child. Are you concerned about hurting him?

LENNON: I'm not going to lie to Julian. Ninety percent of the people on this planet, especially in the West, were born out of a bottle of whiskey on a Saturday night, and there was no intent to have children. So 90 percent of us—that includes everybody—were accidents. I don't know anybody who was a planned child. All of us were Saturday-night specials. Julian is in the majority, along with me and everybody else. Sean is a planned child, and therein lies the difference. I don't love Julian any less as a child. He's still my son, whether he came from a bottle of whiskey or because they didn't have pills in those days. He's here, he belongs to me and he always will.

PLAYBOY: Yoko, your relationship with your daughter has been much rockier.

ONO: I lost Kyoko when she was about five. I was sort of an offbeat mother, but we had very good communication. I wasn't particularly taking care of her, but she was always with me—onstage or at gallery shows, whatever. When she was not even a year old, I took her onstage as an instrument—an uncontrollable instrument, you know. My communication with her was on the level of sharing conversation and doing things. She was closer to my ex-husband because of that.

PLAYBOY: What happened when she was five?

ONO: John and I got together and I separated from my ex-husband [*Tony Cox*]. He took Kyoko away. It became a case of parent kidnaping and we tried to get her back.

LENNON: It was a classic case of men being macho. It turned into me and Allen Klein trying to dominate Tony Cox. Tony's attitude was, "You got my wife, but you won't get my child." In this battle, Yoko and the child were absolutely forgotten. I've always felt bad about it. It became a case of the shoot-out at the O.K. Corral. Cox fled to the hills and hid out and the sheriff and I tracked him down. First we won custody in court. Yoko didn't want to go to court, but the men, Klein and I, did it anyway.

ONO: Allen called up one day, saying I won the court case. He gave me a piece of paper. I said, "What is this piece of paper? Is this what I won? I don't have my child." I knew that taking them to court would frighten them and, of course, it did frighten them. So Tony vanished. He was very strong, thinking that the capitalists, with their money and lawyers and detectives, were pursuing him. It made him stronger.

> "Now I may be very positive, but I also go through deep depressions where I would like to jump out the window."

LENNON: We chased him all over the world. God knows where he went. So if you're reading this, Tony, let's grow up about it. It's gone. We don't want to chase you anymore, because we've done enough damage.

ONO: We also had private detectives chasing Kyoko, which I thought was a bad trip too. One guy came to report, "It was great! We almost had them. We were just behind them in a car, but they sped up and got away." I went hysterical. "What do you mean you almost got them? We are talking about my child!"

LENNON: It was like we were after an escaped convict.

PLAYBOY: Were you so persistent because you felt you were better for Kyoko?

LENNON: Yoko got steamed into a guilt thing that if she wasn't attacking them with detectives and police and the FBI, then she wasn't a good mother looking for her baby. She kept saying, "Leave them alone, leave them alone," but they said you can't do that.

ONO: For me, it was like they just disappeared from my life. Part of me left with them.

PLAYBOY: How old is she now?

ONO: Seventeen, the same as John's son.

PLAYBOY: Perhaps when she gets older, she'll seek you out.

ONO: She is totally frightened. There was a time in Spain when a lawyer and John thought that we should kidnap her.

LENNON: [*Sighing*] I was just going to commit hara-kiri first.

ONO: And we did kidnap her and went to court. The court did a very sensible thing—the judge took her into a room and asked her which one of us she wanted to go with. Of course, she said Tony. We had scared her to death. So now she must be afraid that if she comes to see me, she'll never see her father again.

LENNON: When she gets to be in her 20s, she'll understand that we were idiots and we know we were idiots. She might give us a chance.

ONO: I probably would have lost Kyoko even if it wasn't for John. If I had separated from Tony, there would have been some difficulty.

LENNON: I'll just half-kill myself.

ONO: [*To John*] Part of the reason things got so bad was because with Kyoko, it was you and Tony dealing. Men. With your son Julian, it was women—there was more understanding between me and Cyn.

PLAYBOY: Can you explain that?

ONO: For example, there was a birthday party that Kyoko had and we were both invited, but John felt very uptight about it and he didn't go. He wouldn't deal with Tony. But we were both invited to Julian's party and we both went.

LENNON: Oh, God, it's all coming out.

ONO: Or like when I was invited to Tony's place alone, I couldn't go, but when John was invited to Cyn's, he did go.

LENNON: One rule for the men, one for the women.

ONO: So it was easier for Julian, because I was allowing it to happen.

LENNON: But I've said a million Hail Marys. What the hell else can I do?

PLAYBOY: Yoko, after this experience, how do you feel about leaving Sean's rearing to John?

ONO: I am very clear about my emotions in that area. I don't feel guilty. I am doing it in my own way. It may not be the same as other mothers, but I'm doing it the way I can do it. In general, mothers have a very strong resentment toward their children, even though there's this whole adulation about motherhood and how mothers really think about their children and how they really love them. I mean, they do, but it is not humanly possible to retain emotion that mothers are supposed to have within this society. Women are just too stretched out in different directions to retain that emotion. Too much is required of them. So I say to John—

LENNON: I am her favorite husband—

ONO: "I am carrying the baby nine months and that is enough, so you take care of it afterward." It did sound like a crude remark, but I really believe that children belong to the society. If a mother carries the child and a father raises it, the responsibility is shared.

PLAYBOY: Did you resent having to take so much responsibility, John?

LENNON: Well, sometimes, you know, she'd come home and say, "I'm tired." I'd say, only partly tongue in cheek, "What the fuck do you think I am? I'm 24 hours with the baby! Do you think that's easy?" I'd say, "You're going to take some more interest in the child." I don't care whether it's a father or a mother. When I'm going on about pimples and bones and which TV shows to let him watch, I would say, "Listen, this is important. I don't want to hear about your R350.00 million deal tonight!" [*To Yoko*] I would like both parents to take care of the children, but how is a different matter.

ONO: Society should be more supportive and understanding.

LENNON: It's true. The saying "You've come a long way, baby" applies more to me than to her. As Harry Nilsson says, "Everything is the opposite of what it is, isn't it?" It's men who've come a long way from even contemplating the idea of equality. But although there is this thing called the women's movement, society just took a laxative and they've just farted. They haven't really had a good shit yet. The seed was planted sometime in the late '60s, right? But the real changes are coming. I am the one who has come a long way. I was the pig. And it is a relief not to be a pig. The pressures of being a pig were enormous. I don't have any hankering to be looked upon as a sex object, a male, macho rock-'n'-roll singer. I got over that a long time ago. I'm not even interested in projecting that. So I like it to be known that, yes, I looked after the baby and I made bread and I was a househusband and I am proud of it. It's the wave of the future and I'm glad to be in on the forefront of that too.

ONO: So maybe both of us learned a lot about how men and women suffer because of the social structure. And the only way to change it is to be aware of it. It sounds simple, but important things are simple.

PLAYBOY: John, does it take actually reversing roles with women to understand?

LENNON: It did for this man. But don't forget, I'm the one who benefited the most from doing it. Now I can step back and say Sean is going to be five years old and I was able to spend his first five years with him and I am very proud of that. And come to think of it, it looks like I'm going to be 40 and life begins at 40—so they promise. And I believe it, too. I feel fine and I'm very excited. It's like, you know, hitting 21, like, "Wow, what's going to happen next?" Only this time we're together.

ONO: If two are gathered together, there's nothing you can't do.

PLAYBOY: What does the title of your new album, Double Fantasy, mean?

LENNON: It's a flower, a type of freesia, but what it means to us is that if two people picture the same image at the same time, that is the secret. You can be together but projecting two different images and either whoever's the stronger at the time will get his or her fantasy fulfilled or you will get nothing but mishmash.

PLAYBOY: You saw the news item that said you were putting your sex fantasies out as an album.

LENNON: Oh, yeah. That is like when we did the bed-in in Toronto in 1969. They all came charging through the door, thinking we were going to be screwing in bed. Of course, we were just sitting there with peace signs.

PLAYBOY: What was that famous bed-in all about?

LENNON: Our life is our art. That's what the bed-ins were. When we got married, we knew our honeymoon was going to be public, anyway, so we decided to use it to make a statement. We sat in bed and talked to reporters for seven days. It was hilarious. In effect, we were doing a commercial for peace on the front page of the papers instead of a commercial for war.

PLAYBOY: You stayed in bed and talked about peace?

LENNON: Yes. We answered questions. One guy kept going over the point about Hitler: "What do you do about Fascists? How can you have peace when you've got a Hitler?" Yoko said, "I would have gone to bed with him." She said she'd have needed only 10 days with him. People loved that one.

ONO: I said it facetiously, of course. But the point is, you're not going to change the world by fighting. Maybe I was naive about the 10 days with Hitler. After all, it took 13 years with John Lennon. [*She giggles*]

PLAYBOY: What were the reports about your making love in a bag?

ONO: We never made love in a bag. People probably imagined that we were making love. It was just, all of us are in a bag, you know. The point was the outline of the bag, you know, the movement of the bag, how much we see of a person, you know. But, inside, there might be a lot going on. Or maybe nothing's going on.

> "Part of me suspects that I'm a loser and the other part of me thinks I'm God almighty."

Pretty in Pink:

The Greatest Gifts Given to Prize-Winning Playmates

WRITTEN BY
TORI LYNN ADAMS

PHOTOS BY
THE PLAYBOY ARCHIVES

Longtime PLAYBOY fans and devoted readers likely recognize the soft-blush tones pictured above. The petal-perfect hue, dubbed "Playmate Pink," was announced in the magazine in February 1965—"a striking new color shade conceived by Playboy"—in a pictorial featuring 1964 Playmate of the Year Donna Michelle. The cotton-candy color became a tradition in PMOY pictorials that lasted into the 1970s. But how did the practice of crowning a PMOY begin in the first place?

For years after its founding in 1953, the magazine editors received letters from eager readers expressing their favorite Playmates. In 1956, Michigan State undergrads wrote to declare they had named June Playmate Gloria Walker their Playmate of the Year, in addition to the standard title of Playmate of the Month. PLAYBOY recognized a good idea when it heard one, and soon decided to bestow the Playmate of the Year title upon one lucky winner each year. Choosing from 12 exceptional Playmates proved challenging, and reader feedback was key. December 1959 Playmate Ellen Stratton was named the first official Playmate of the Year in 1960. (Unofficially, Playboy gave the title to Lisa Winters in 1957 and Joyce Nizzari in 1959.)

From a scuba suit to a blonde wig, a look back at some of the most fascinating Playmate of the Year presents—plus a quick history of Playmate Pink

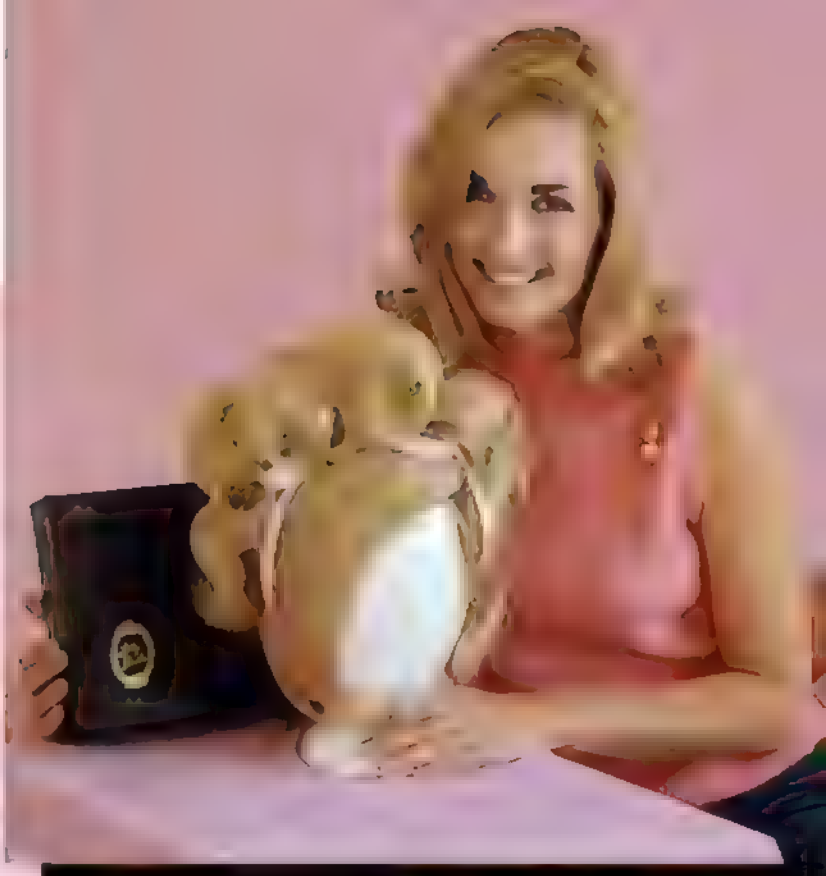
To further honor the PMOYs, Playboy put together gift packages with items such as luggage sets, stereos, cars, clothing and novelty items—many of which came in Playmate Pink, naturally. Are you wondering what to give the queen in your life? Explore these photos of early PMOYs and their prizes for inspiration. (And, when in doubt, head to the Playboy Shop for your own Playboy gear!)

"If anyone had told me I'd be wearing mink by my 20th birthday, I'd have sworn they were ribbing me," said Jo Collins of her white mink cape by Alper Furs. Collins was favored by PLAYBOY readers, who chose her as their favorite 1964 Playmate, and Vietnam soldiers, who requested that Playboy send her to pay them a visit during the war. Collins's prizes, worth more than $10,000 at the time, included a gallon bottle of Kahlua, which she puts into perspective here.

The Dodge Charger fastback Allison Parks received as part of her Playmate of the Year gift package was the perfect means of transportation to speed to the local airway, where she was training for her private pilot's license. In addition to her affinity for aviation, Parks also loved spending time in the pool and garden. Her new toolkit was perfect for her active lifestyle, while the Lilly Daché wig from Donna Elaine may have proved useful in her acting endeavors. Parks was also a regular on Playboy After Dark, Hugh Hefner's variety show.

Jo Collins, 1965 Playmate of the Year

Allison Parks, 1966 Playmate of the Year



Lisa Baker shows off two wafer looks here: a stylish swimwear set complete with Renauld of France sunglasses and a scuba diving getup featuring a Swimaster tank from W.J. Voit and other gear from U.S. Divers. Baker's most tantalizing Playmate gift, though, was a record contract audition from Monument. The music lover, who counted Count Basie among her favorites, was discovered by photographer Bill Figge at a wedding. She went on to become the November 1966 Playmate—and Figge's personal secretary.

Lisa Baker, 1967 Playmate of the Year

Baker's scuba gear would certainly come in handy for Connie Kreski, an outdoors lover. When Kreski traveled to London after becoming a Playmate, she not only landed herself a role in a major movie (she met actor and director Anthony Newley in an elevator at the London Playboy Club), but also spent time shopping the latest styles. "The Mod shops in Knightsbridge sell the wildest outfits I've ever seen," she told PLAYBOY at the time. Here, the free thinker and passionate Playmate rocks some equally far-out fashions, featuring the Walter Holmes Vibration collection and gloves from Aris.

Connie Kreski, 1969 Playmate of the Year

Between working as a model and actress and traveling the world for Playboy promotion opportunities, Claudia Jennings had quite a full plate. That's why she prioritized rest and relaxation. "You've got to sit down and relax sometimes, since the future will be unpredictable even if you work 24 hours a day," she told PLAYBOY. We think these cassettes probably did the trick. Or, if she felt so moved, the master communicator may have enjoyed typing on this Smith Corona Electra 210 typewriter—a skill she put to good use while working as a receptionist at Playboy before becoming a Playmate.

Claudia Jennings, 1970
Playmate of the Year

Sharon Clark keeps an eye on the time with her new Lady Hamilton 14-karat gold-and-diamond watch. Traveling—Clark went all the way to Micronesia for her Playmate pictorial—and being active were among her favorite ways to spend time, but the sunny Playmate also hoped to get into acting. Included in her many gifts were a Yamaha Mini-Enduro and a ruby-eyed gold Rabbit pin by Maria Vogt.

Sharon Clark, 1971 Playmate of the Year

"I've always liked being in the spotlight," said Playmate Cyndi Wood. Raised by an actress and recording-company executive, Wood gravitated to the arts. Not only did it land her a spot as Playboy's February 1973 Playmate, but it also got her quite a few dancing, modeling, singing and acting gigs, including a memorable role in Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now. The above Schwinn Super Sport 10-speed bike and four-piece set of Samsonite luggage (in Playmate Pink) are just a glimpse of the grand gifts Wood received in her Playmate of the Year package.

Cyndi Wood, 1974 Playmate of the Year

The Future of Fully Legal Cannabis

Between legalization, social justice and access for veterans, cannabis reforms are pushing boundaries in 2021

BY **ALLIE VOLPE**

PHOTOS BY **MITCH M**

Last year was an eventful one for cannabis in the United States. At the onset of the pandemic in the spring, dispensaries were deemed essential businesses in more than a dozen states, causing consumers to race to stock up on supplies. In the fall, record-breaking wildfires brought on by the effects of climate change jeopardized the crops and livelihoods of growers in California, Oregon and Washington. As a result, harvests were delayed, crops were smaller than previous years and smoke in the air caused budding flowers to take on a smoky taste. Yet consumers spent consistently on cannabis throughout the year, showing that weed is not only recession- and pandemic-proof, but also, for many, truly essential.

States across the country also passed cannabis-related legislation in 2020. In February, the New Hampshire Senate passed a bill allowing medical marijuana patients to grow their own weed, and in May, Virginia decriminalized marijuana possession up to one ounce. In November, Americans weighed in on various cannabis measures in what turned out to be a historic year for cannabis legalization.

So what does this mean for cannabis consumers and cultivators in 2021? Read on to get the full breakdown of cannabis reforms happening throughout the country.

Cannabis as a National Issue

Although the 2020 elections were contentious, Americans in five states largely agreed on one thing: cannabis. In the five states where cannabis initiatives were on the November ballot—Arizona, Montana, New Jersey, South Dakota and Mississippi—all proposals were approved. Voters in Arizona, Montana, New Jersey and South Dakota passed initiatives legalizing marijuana for adults over 21 years old, while Mississippi and South Dakota approved medical marijuana measures.

In a historic vote a month later, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would have decriminalized marijuana at the federal level. The Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act, or MORE Act, would remove marijuana from the list of scheduled substances under the Controlled Substances Act and eliminate criminal penalties for manufacturing, distributing or possessing marijuana. The bill would also require the allocation of funds supporting businesses and communities impacted by the war on drugs and provide access to medical cannabis for veterans. Though the bill stalled in the Senate, advocates are optimistic that between the widespread approval of state-level ballot initiatives and the House's passage of the MORE Act—which marked the first time Congress has ever voted on the decriminalization of cannabis—the stage is set to approach legalization in a meaningful way in 2021 and beyond.

"The big takeaway from Election Day was that no one can say that this is an issue that is confined to deep blue states or coastal states," says Erik Altieri, executive director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (known to many as NORML). "It's truly an issue that's supported across the country. These victories at the state level provide upward pressure on our federal officials."

Groundwork at the State Level

Cannabis reform has often started at the state and local level, with criminal justice and mental health care programs. Now that a third of the country's population lives in states where cannabis has been legalized, however, the pressure is on federal lawmakers to bridge the divide between local and national laws and the attitudes of constituents. (According to a recent Gallup poll, 68 percent of Americans are in favor of legalization.)

"The old saying that the states are the laboratory of democracy really rings true here," says Steve Hawkins, executive director of the Marijuana Policy Project. "This is a very classic example of the fact that change rarely comes from Washington. It normally comes to Washington, and that's where we are."

As cannabis legalization spreads, previously reluctant lawmakers will likely become more supportive of cannabis reform, Altieri argues. This year a third of the House and more than a quarter of the Senate will represent states where cannabis is legal. Politicians in neighboring states may follow their lead. For example, lawmakers in New York and Pennsylvania are feeling the pressure to legalize adult-use cannabis, lest they lose business and tax dollars to New Jersey. "I [can] see 15 legal states turning into potentially 20 legal states next year," Altieri says. On a global scale, legalization in Canada and potentially Mexico also puts the U.S. in a position to follow the momentum of countries worldwide, Hawkins says.

Racial and Social Justice Initiatives

Federal marijuana arrests continue to persist. In 2018, 40 percent of drug arrests were for the possession, sale or manufacture of marijuana (more than any other drug, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of FBI data). In 2019, that rate dropped slightly, to 35 percent. It is important to note that drastic racial disparities emerge with consistency among these arrests: A Black person is more than three times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person, according to the ACLU's 2020 report A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform.

Central to many legalization initiatives—including the MORE Act and Arizona and New Jersey's legalization bills—is the need for social equity and restorative

> "Legalizing marijuana in and of itself doesn't end systemic racism, but it takes a huge tool out of the system's toolkit that is being used to oppress Black and brown Americans."

justice programs. In Arizona, people with minor marijuana convictions can have their records expunged, and the state will reserve 26 licenses for business owners disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs. New Jersey's bill creates a social equity excise fee whose funds will support social-good programs—like legal aid, drug rehabilitation and reentry for former prisoners—in communities impacted by disproportionate arrest rates and drug charges. As more states legalize cannabis, social justice and equity continue to emerge as essential aspects of the decriminalization process.

"Legalizing marijuana in and of itself doesn't end systemic racism, but it takes a huge tool out of the system's toolkit that is being used to oppress Black and brown Americans," Altieri says. "In the early days, state lawmakers would typically focus on things like revenue, but now, just as equally, if not more prominently, they're talking about the issues of racial justice and of mass incarceration."

Legal Cannabis for Veterans

This year could see a landmark shift for veterans' access to cannabis as well. Due to its federally illicit status, the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot prescribe medical marijuana to veteran patients, driving many to the black market. A 2017 American Legion survey found 83 percent of veteran households supported cannabis legalization, and 92 percent were in favor of additional research into the efficacy of medical marijuana. Should the MORE Act eventually become law, Veterans Affairs doctors could recommend medical marijuana to patients in states where medical use is legal.

Just as in the wider population (as seen by support for state-level cannabis initiatives and the House vote on the MORE Act), the veteran community has seen a decrease in the stigma around cannabis use, says Doug Distaso, executive director of the Veterans Cannabis Project. Distaso has heard firsthand accounts from vets about the plant's apparent therapeutic properties. Those anecdotal accounts are backed up by studies that have shown cannabis to relieve symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, insomnia and pain.

With a new secretary of veterans affairs appointed by Joe Biden, Distaso hopes for more research into cannabis's medicinal benefits, especially as it pertains to veterans.

"About nine million [veterans] get our health care from the Veterans Administration, and there's no real mechanism to discuss the health concerns of cannabis and why it's helping or how it's helping," he says. "Every state that legalizes [cannabis] helps end the stigma." Moreover, Distaso says, cannabis provides an alternative to potentially harmful prescription drugs for many veterans who are struggling with physical and mental ailments.

2021 and Beyond

Although the outlook for legal cannabis is optimistic, challenges remain. Politicians resistant to reform hold the keys to federal legalization, Altieri says. Proponents must build on the momentum of recent victories and continue to rally support and invigorate organizers, donors and, eventually, lawmakers.

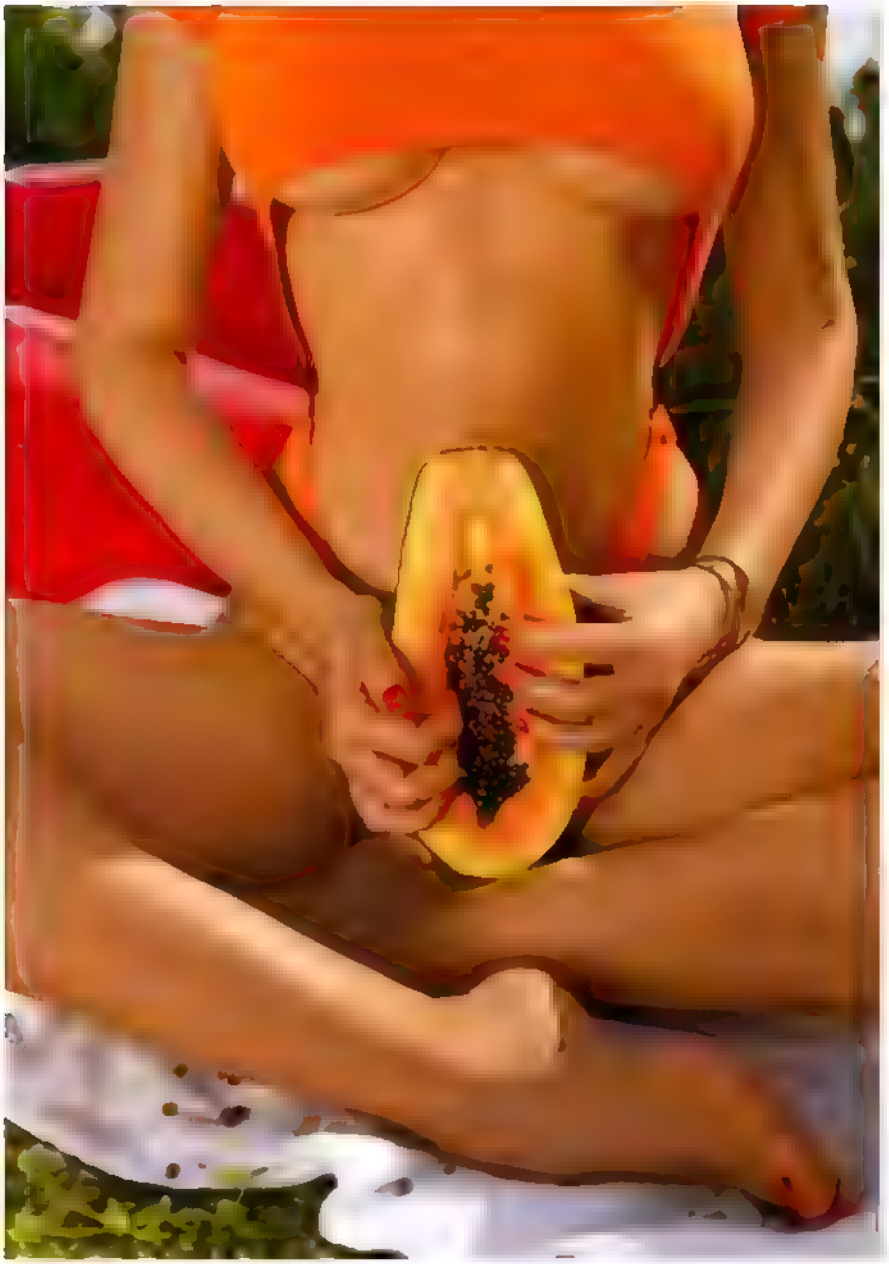
"Just because things are going in a positive direction doesn't mean that things can't stall," Hawkins says. "This is not the time for anybody to take their foot off the gas. This will require a dedicated group of people who are going to put their time and energy and effort into it."

GLOBAL ICON

Rosie Ave

Photography by **Olga Novikova | @olga_novikova_work**
Makeup & Hair **Nisa Dupree**

LOCAL



Tell us about the moment you found out you would be featured in the magazine. What was your initial reaction? I was on cloud 9 and jumping for joy upon being told the news! I've received an email that I'm confirmed for the Feb 2024 Australia cover feature when I was on vacation in Hawaii with my friends. We were by the pool, so we immediately ordered champagne and celebrated this special moment. Being on the cover of Playboy is an incredible honor and an opportunity to express my sensuality, and confidence and hopefully captivate and inspire others.

Can you share your favorite shot or spread from the magazine and why it holds special significance for you? I love the cover shot - how gorgeous and radiantly happy I look! I think that happiness is the ultimate beauty secret.

When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? Being in nature is the best way to relax and it also generates joy, calmness, and creativity. When I don't have a chance to get out of the city I do yoga, meditate, and spend a lot of time in the spa and sauna.

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? Actually, I've never had a strange or weird or crazy fan encounter. So far everyone has been very respectful, responsible, and cool. I'd like to think that that's the crowd I attract and hoping to keep it this way.

What's the best "wardrobe malfunction" story that you can now laugh about? At the Christmas party this year I was greeting a male friend and one of the straps on my dress snapped, leading to an awkward moment where my bare boob accidentally touched his chest for a few seconds. I hope he's enjoyed the experience.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? My biggest dreams include reaching personal fulfillment and happiness, making a positive impact on other's lives, and attaining the most success in modeling. I also would like to travel as much as possible and experience different cultures. Eventually, I'd like to find true love and create fulfilling and lasting relationships.

What's the weirdest beauty tip or trick you've picked up? It's a trick I've recently picked up while on vacation in the Caribbean - smear a small dab of toothpaste on the insect bite and the itch will disappear.

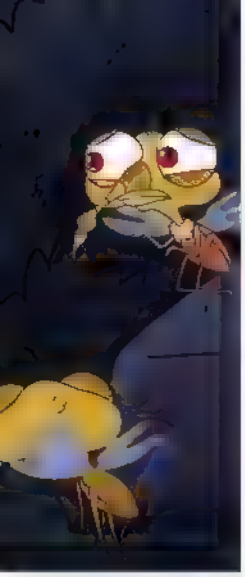
If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? Definitely the cutest sunglasses. What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? Nutella Crepes. Yum!

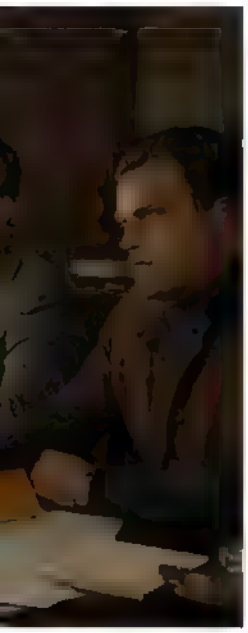
What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? I can't stand manipulative and narcissistic men. Being too self-involved is a major turn-off. Also - mind games and mixed signals. I very much appreciate honesty and straightforward people.

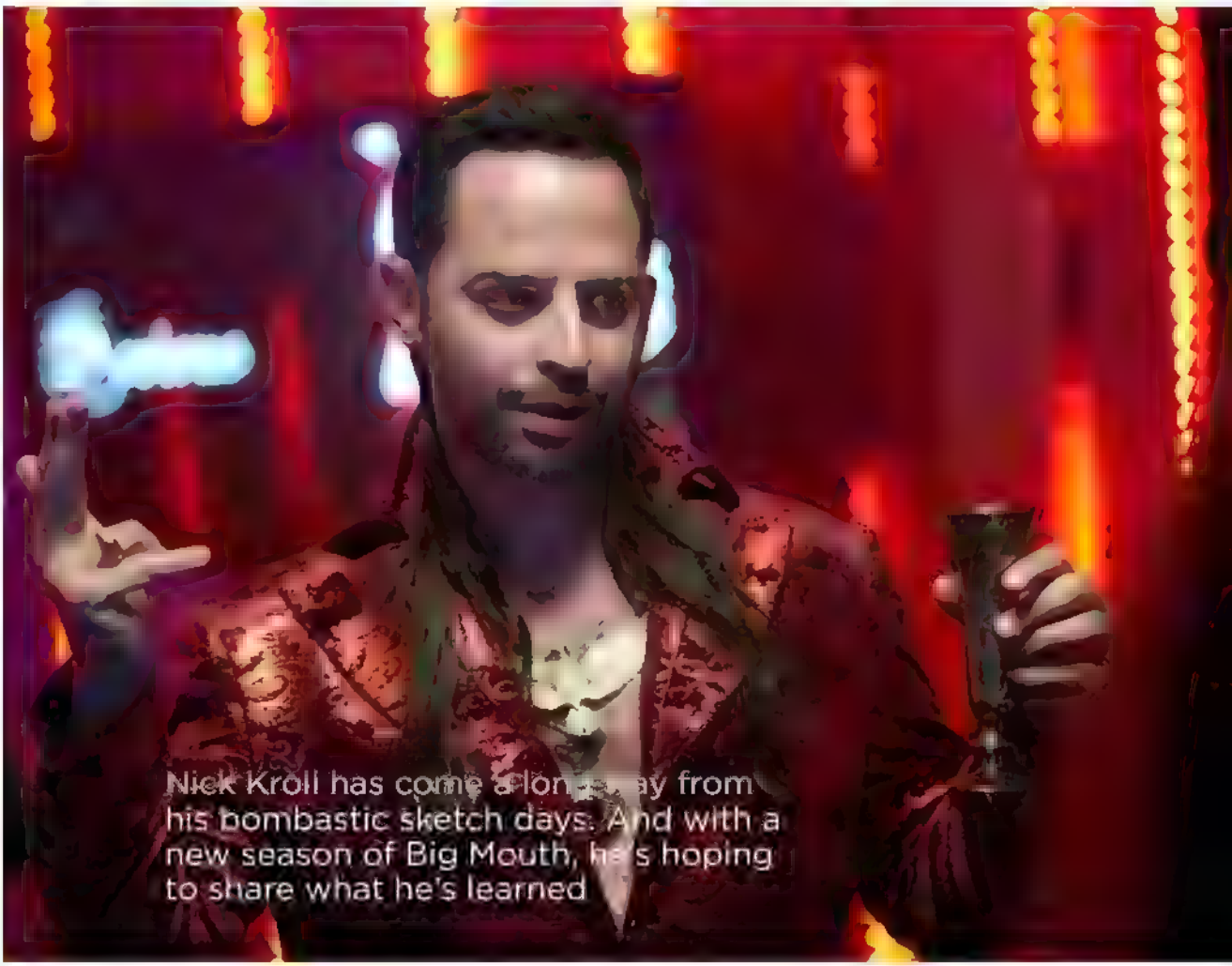
What advice would you give to aspiring models? I think it's essential to have a strong online presence. Social Media is also a very powerful tool as it allows you to advertise yourself, connect with key figures, and keep people updated with your latest info, shoots, etc. Networking online is also essential as this is a great way to build your network with ppl. Also, you have to be professional through and through - return emails and calls promptly, and always be on time. Also, I can't stress enough how important it is to take care of your mental health by managing stress and surround yourself with positive influences!

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words for our readers? Embrace your sexy and playful side, and let your confidence shine like a star. Life's too short to hold back, so go out there and have fun.

Out of Character With Nick Kroll







Nick Kroll has come a long way from his bombastic sketch days. And with a new season of Big Mouth, he's hoping to share what he's learned

BY **JULIE SEABAUGH** PHOTOS BY **SHUTTERSTOCK**

Nick Kroll doesn't like being online.

Although much of his early career was defined by his outsize sketch characters, many of whom have become viral figures, Kroll preferred to let the internet's gaze stop there

"I don't love giving personal access, so the whole thing used to make my skin crawl," Kroll says over a Zoom call from his home in Los Angeles. "I stayed away from it for the most part because I'd rather have my work speak for what my personal beliefs are. I really struggle on social media because it's not what I intended to do. I intended to do comedy and write and be an actor and produce things. I didn't intend to be a personality who has a take on everything "

That ended in 2020 This interview happened just a few days after November's presidential election was officially called for Joe Biden The victory provided a cautiously optimistic bookend to a turbulent year that included a global health dilemma, a racial justice reckoning and a leadership crisis. From quarantine, public and private figures alike were forced to rethink how they showed up on social media

"At a time when so many people felt powerless and someone like me has a platform, it became impossible to stay quiet," Kroll says

That took different forms. Sometimes it was signal-boosting GoFundMe accounts for the families of victims of police brutality such as Breonna Taylor and Jacob Blake or encouraging donations to organizations such as Black Visions Collective and Equal Justice Initiative But it was also confronting past failures on his own projects, namely the decision to cast Jenny Slate as a young girl of color on his critically adored Netflix show Big Mouth, the fourth season of which premieres December 4.

"We sincerely regret and apologize for our original decision to cast a white actor to voice a biracial character," Kroll posted on his Instagram and Twitter in June, as Black Lives Matter discussions rose to the foreground of national media. "We made a mistake, took our privilege for granted, and we are working hard to do better moving forward "

When I asked if the issue of Slate voicing a nonwhite character had ever come up prior to this summer, he acknowledges that it had.

"Jenny had vocalized it in the past. It kept coming up in various ways. Then around the George Floyd murder and everything that followed, Jenny said she really didn't feel comfortable, so we went to our black writers and cast members to talk about it," Kroll says of the decision to recast the character. "I can't say they were easy conversations, but none of it was contentious It all made sense "

"We had to admit our blind spots, and I think we have ultimately landed in a really good place with Ayo [Edebiri], who is such a talented and funny and smart performer and writer."

The casting of Edebiri feels even more timely when you realize season four goes into the characters' explorations of identity Following Slate's decision to step down from voicing the half-black Missy Foreman-Greenwald, comedian and writer Edebiri assumed the role beginning with season four's penultimate episode. "It makes sense and it's the right thing to do, especially as we're diving more into Missy's story," says Edebiri, who'd come aboard the show as a writer eight months prior.

"What helps make Kroll's voice so relevant is he has the ability to change He still has his point of view and the things that make him him," Edebiri says. "But he's able to learn and grow. There are people who only want their comedic clones around them because they think that's how they keep their legacy, but he doesn't seem interested in that "

The 42-year-old Kroll is serious about becoming a better ally, and a better version of himself And some of that is reflected in his work on the hit Big Mouth, which he co-created, writes for and voices multiple characters on

As the public face of a no-holds-barred animated sitcom centered on junior-high classmates grappling with puberty, Kroll doesn't fit an obvious mold of social-justice warriordom. But with Netflix blessing the show with a rare multiseason renewal, Big Mouth has proven itself a standout among a current crop of sexually diverse and sex-positive series that aim to educate as much as entertain. His show's success has encouraged Kroll to continue achieving more with his comedy than simply getting laughs He's determined to use it as a platform to help others understand lessons he's long struggled to teach himself

Kroll grew up the youngest of four in affluent Westchester County, New York. He attended Jewish day school, private prep school and Washington D.C 's Georgetown University. Although Kroll majored in history, he simultaneously gravitated toward media studies and performance

As a freshman, Kroll bombed a Funniest Act on Campus contest but was encouraged to audition for future one-man-show maestro Mike Birbiglia's burgeoning Georgetown Players improv troupe. By senior year, Kroll was the director, and responsible for casting then-freshman John Mulaney, who would become a frequent collaborator and eventual Big Mouth co-star

In early 2002, Kroll headed to New York City, where he soon began writing for Chappelle's Show Within seven years, he was playing uber-asshole Rodney Ruxin on FX ensemble comedy The League.

As Kroll's star rose with The League, Comedy Central offered an outlet for him to showcase his long-running characters. Kroll Show's Bobby Bottleservice, Fabrice Fabrice, El Chupacabra, Rich Dicks and Oh,

"We had to admit our blind spots, and I think we have ultimately landed in a really good place with Ayo Edebiri, who is such a talented and funny and smart performer and writer."

Hello cranks Gil Faizon (Kroll) and George St. Geegland (Mulaney) proved themselves noxious, needy, perfectly self-absorbed satires of reality-TV wannabes.

In 2015, as both The League and his namesake show were ending after decent runs, Kroll looked for ways to challenge himself even further. While voicing a literal feminine douche in Seth Rogen's Sausage Party, Kroll recognized animation as an outlet to "draw anything and go anywhere."

"I was on two TV shows and felt incredibly lucky to be on both of them, but also walking through the airport was a little intense at times," Kroll says of that time. "I was not and am not as recognizable as a lot of my friends, but I think I was like, 'Okay, this is what it feels like to be on TV a lot. Maybe if I do animation, where you don't see my face at all, that will be a nice change of pace as well as just creatively different."

The resulting Big Mouth is a smart, fast-paced raunchfest that celebrates both physical changes and emotional growth. Randy "hormone monsters," frequent musical numbers and plenty of cartoon nudity share space with frank discussions of mental illness, family dysfunction and feminism. The character diversity—ethnicity, sexual orientation, ableness—is off the charts. Three seasons in, the series has been nominated for two Emmys and cited by Time magazine as a highlight of modern adult animation's "new Golden Age." Along with the teen-focused Sex Education and Pen15, Big Mouth is proactively

"We carry so much of our puberty stuff with us into adulthood. That anxiety is something all of us deal with, and it doesn't just go away like pimples do."

Big Mouth character Missy Foreman-Greenwald, now voiced by Ayo Edebiri

"You take an extra look at what you're doing, what the joke is and who the target of the joke is. It doesn't stop you from continuing to do crazy, fun things. It just makes you think a little more before you do something."

helping shift public discourse around sex from taboo to on-trend.

"We carry so much of our puberty stuff with us into adulthood," Kroll acknowledges. "That anxiety is something all of us deal with, and it doesn't just go away like pimples do." Citing inescapable anxiety fodder like social media, 24-hour news cycles and election worries, he continues, "Trying to figure out tools to help lessen it is really useful right now. Hopefully the silliness of our show takes away some of its power."

Big Mouth's fourth season, which has anxiety as a central theme, became Kroll's most personal work to date. Autobiographical plot points abound: experiencing insecurities and inadequacies in public camp showers, sabotaging his deepest friendships, even meeting a future version of his character Nick Birch as an adult paralyzed by the threat of romantic intimacy.

"At the time we were writing this, which was a year and a half ago, I was in a relationship but I hadn't fully committed," he says. "I was really dealing with questions of intimacy and the fear of, Will I be this person who is unable to fully connect to someone?"

The entire season, Kroll says, was emotionally draining to write. "I'm in therapy and I talk about the stuff I'm working through in therapy in the writers' room, and I'm taking the stuff we're talking about in the writers' room into therapy, you know?"

In 2019, in addition to the announcement it had picked up Big Mouth through season six, Netflix revealed a spinoff, Human Resources. Kroll describes the latter as "a workplace comedy about the world of the monsters and creatures on Big Mouth," one strategically designed to cover stories of "birth and death and divorce, all the other huge elements of life that a show about a bunch of kids going through puberty doesn't really allow real estate for."

The hefty workload of dual shows doesn't faze him—The League and Kroll Show ran concurrently—particularly now that Big Mouth can intentionally pace itself toward specific character goals. Like, perchance, Nick Birch going all the way with a girl?

"If that were the case," Kroll groans, "it would be around episode 190—a.k.a., I was 19 when I lost my virginity."

On the acting front, Kroll is adamant about expanding his range of roles, following dramas such as 2016's Loving and 2018's Operation Finale with the upcoming Olivia Wilde thriller Don't Worry Darling. The blogosphere even spread rumors he was up for the Marvel role of Moon Knight, a Batman-esque hero who struggles with his family's Jewish roots.

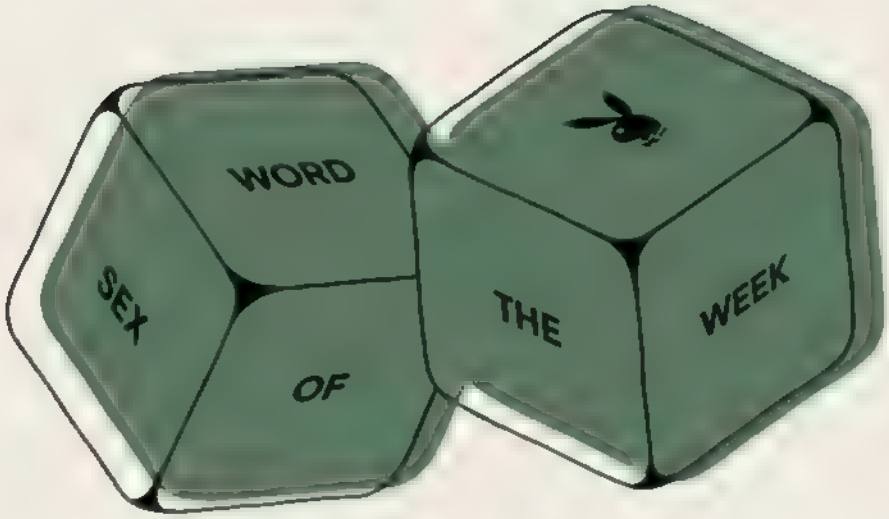
"I think I experienced that alongside the internet," Kroll laughs. "But something like that would be super cool. Who isn't intrigued by that world? And that particular character for me, as a Jewish guy. Lot of Jewish guys writing comic books; not a ton of Jewish superheroes at the center of them. But I would love to do all that stuff. I'm a big fan of the combo platter."

Whether it's animation or drama or activism, Kroll isn't done trying new things and growing. In light of the world—and comedy—changing, I ask if he would do anything differently today if he could rework some of the Kroll Show characters that made him famous, such as the gay, multiethnic Fabrice Fabrice, the Latino El Chupacabra, or even the differently abled portrayals in Wheels Ontario.

"There are definitely things I would not do now that I did years ago," Kroll says. "But we all have to own everything we've done because we were the ones who did them. You take an extra look at what you're doing, what the joke is and who the target of the joke is. It doesn't stop you from continuing to do crazy, fun things. It just makes you have to work a little harder and think a little more before you do or say something. That's okay."

With Big Mouth, Kroll has found a platform to keep his focus trained on the future, professionally as well as personally. He may have left other dated characters behind, but there will always be more work to put in.

"The beauty of doing a show about kids going through puberty—and really a show about kids going through changes—is that they can evolve and change both physically and emotionally," he says. "For us creatively, we can make our show do the same."



Cuckqueen

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATION BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

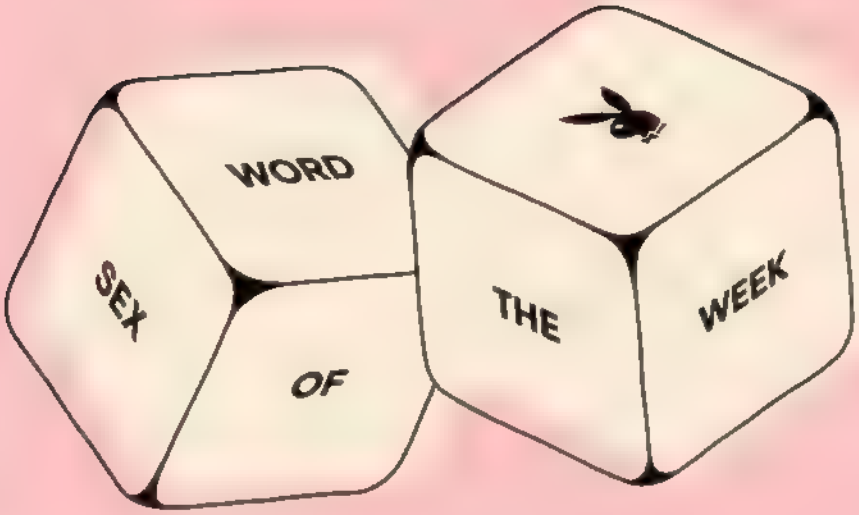
cuckqueen (*variant: cuckquean*) (*n*) a woman who enjoys watching her partner engage in sexual activity with someone else

Jessica, new to being a cuckqueen, felt her heart race as she saw her husband climb on top of the woman they met that night

Cuckold is a common, ancient term. Usually hurled at a submissive man as an insult, it describes someone who is greatly aroused by watching their partner be unfaithful. Today, we're discussing the cuckold's lesser-known female equivalent, the cuckqueen. Men aren't the only ones who "like to watch." There's a community of women who derive pleasure, or even compersion, for those who have been following this series closely, from seeing their partner orgasm without them.

There's a bit of a masochistic aspect to it, as the cuckqueen often likes feeling victimized or humiliated by the process. There are different levels of cuckqueening. Watching your partner have a bedroom romp with someone else is one form, but it could also be sitting idly by as they flirt with another woman at a bar.

As long as there is effective communication and boundaries have been set for you, your partner and whomever they've decided to bring into the cuckqueen session, there's no yuck in a good cuck.



Merkin

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATION BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

merkin (*n*) a pubic wig

Jackson nervously adjusted his merkin as he climbed onto the bed for the romance flick's first love-making scene.

It's the first week of December, and the weather outside is getting frightful. Don't worry. With your warm, toasty merkin, you can let it snow with nothing to fear. A merkin is basically a cute little hair piece that keeps your private parts, well, private. It's a pube wig—a crotch weave, if you will.

It's not entirely clear when the term came about, but it may have been as early as the 1400s. Merkins are believed to have been originally sported by sex workers who wanted to decorate the mons pubis they kept clean-shaven for hygienic reasons.

Now it's mostly used in film or theater to give the illusion of a luxurious bush or to delicately toe the line of full-frontal nudity. A well-crafted merkin is hard to detect, but you can catch glimpses of them in plenty of Hollywood projects. Rooney Mara in The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, Jake Gyllenhaal in Love & Other Drugs and Kate Winslet in The Reader.

The decision to wear a merkin can also simply be a fashion statement, a rebellion against the stringent grooming codes society foisted upon us. Fashion designer Kaimin made merkins one of the most memorable fashion trends of 2018 when she sent them down the runway at New York Fashion Week.

So while we bust out our winter wardrobes, remember you can layer up as much or as little as you want.

CHANEL

UNFORGETTABLE Claudia Fijal

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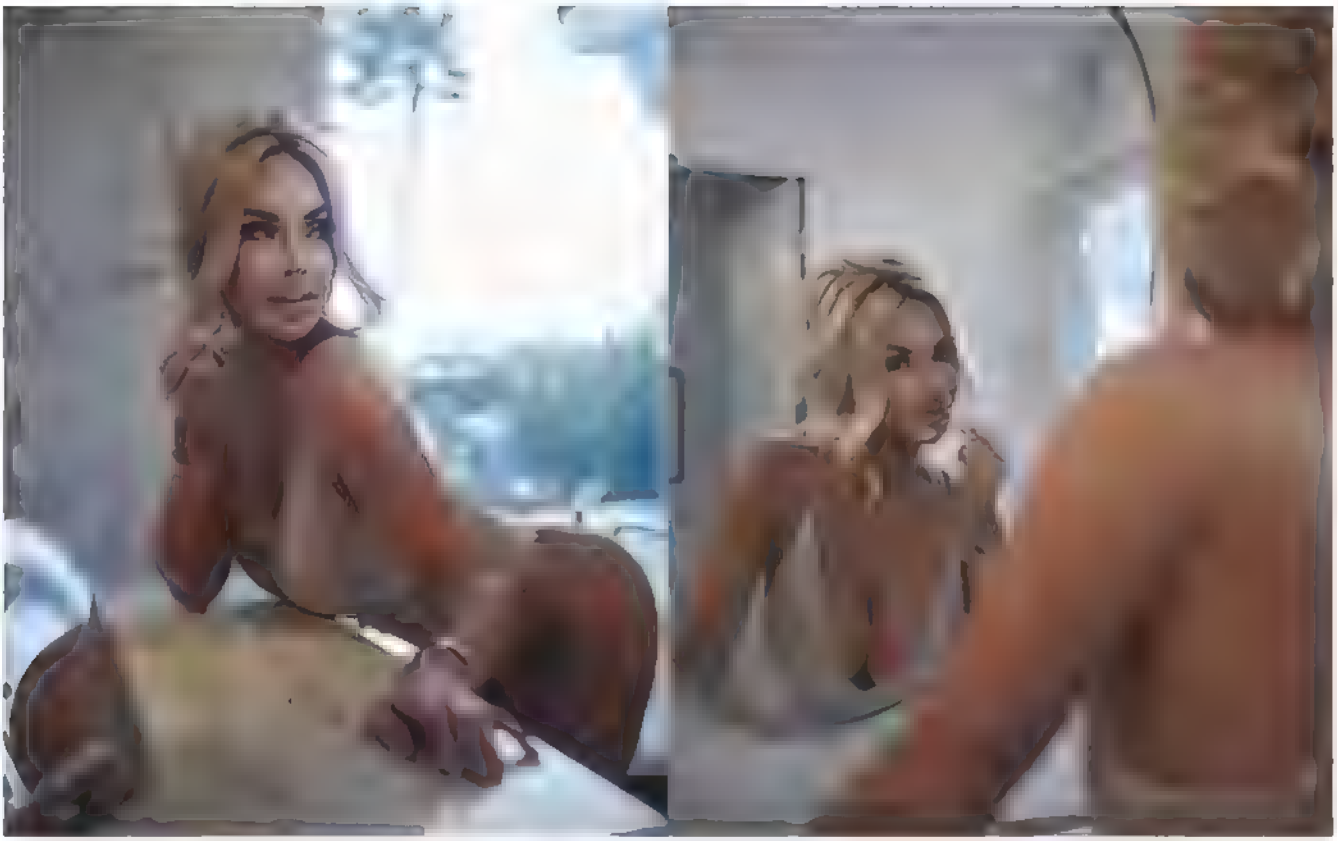


Tell us about the moment you found out you would be featured in the magazine. What was your initial reaction? Being a longtime Playboy model, the feeling of appearing in the magazine truly never gets old. What an incredible legacy to be a part of.

Can you share your favorite shot or spread from the magazine and why it holds special significance for you? I absolutely loved shooting this spread. The photos have such a real and intimate feel to them. I've been shooting more fashion lately, with my splash of sexy added to it, and it's been so empowering feeling this powerful with clothes on.

When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? A nice dinner out with a fine tequila and good conversation helps me wind down.

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? I had a fan send me a satanic bible and an upside-down cross, extremely uncomfortable feeling there.

What's the best "wardrobe malfunction" story that you can now laugh about? There are no such things as malfunctions when you're a nudist! If I could be naked 24/7, my life would be complete.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I hope to one day own more real estate. I own a couple of properties now and each purchase has been so rewarding. It's so exciting watching your equity grow.

What's the weirdest beauty tip or trick you've picked up? Ice! It literally helps anything! Puffiness, acne, tiredness, redness, swelling.

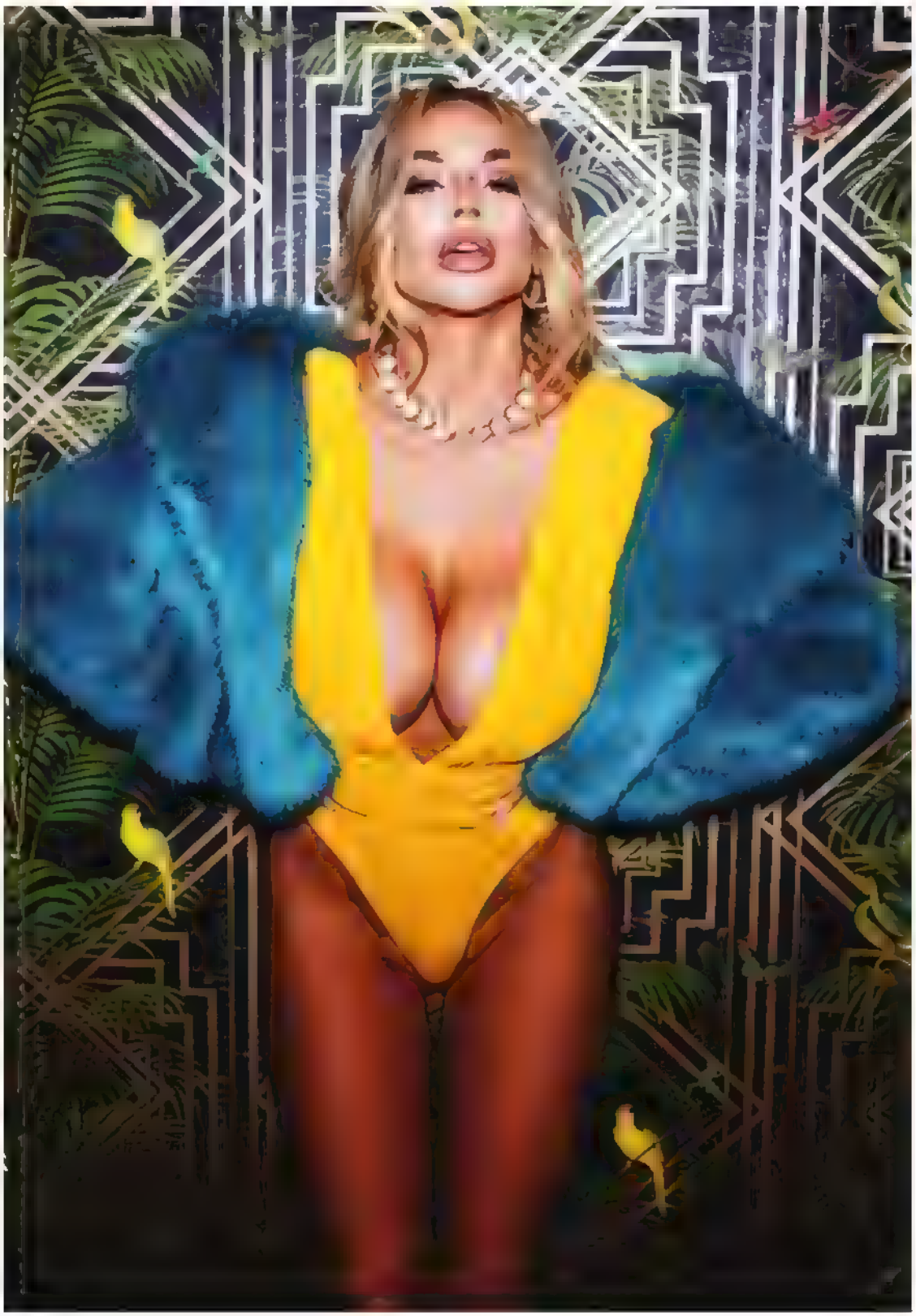
If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? Sun block til they find me!

What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? Gummy bears. Yum.

What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? Be disrespectful or misogynistic towards women. I have zero tolerance for it.

What advice would you give to aspiring models? Set firm boundaries early on and stick to them! As a longtime model, I feel extremely desensitized to a lot in the modeling world now so it's important to have clear guidelines for yourself with what you are and aren't comfortable with shooting.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words for our readers? Thank you so much Playboy for the opportunity to share my craft with you. I remember being 18 years old and meeting Hef at the mansion for the first time and having a conversation with him I'll never forget. I asked him for advice on how to succeed in LA and his exact words were, "Be a good person, and do right by people, and you'll always be ok." Now I pass those words on to you! Thank you again, til next time.



Playboy Interview

Berry Gordy

A candid conversation with the maestro of Motown about building an empire against all odds, clashing with Michael Jackson's father—and why he left all of it behind

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID SHEFF** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MIZUNO**

On the jacket of Berry Gordy Jr.'s autobiography, To Be Loved, are testimonials by some of the people who have been affected by him: Smokey Robinson, Dick Clark, David Geffen, Lee Iacocca, Barry Diller, Mike Ovitz, Sidney Poitier and Diana Ross. But Gordy's influence was not felt only by his peers in the entertainment and business worlds. There is hardly an adult anywhere in the world who doesn't recognize at least some of the music that came from Gordy's Motown Studios. As Clark says, "Berry's music, that Motown magic, provides the soundtrack of our lives."

A list of the artists who created that soundtrack reminds everyone what a potent musical force Motown was: the Four Tops, Marvin Gaye, the Jackson 5, the Marvelettes, Martha and the Vandellas, Lionel Richie, Smokey Robinson & the Miracles, the Supremes, the Temptations, Mary Wells, Stevie Wonder. For five weeks in 1968 and 1969 Motown artists held the top three spots on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. It would be an amazing achievement for any record company. But for Motown—whose acts were primarily African American and whose music captured America's urban essence—such success made history.

Motown was Berry Gordy, the enigmat-

ic, tenacious, revered and occasionally reviled mogul who launched the record company in his hometown of Detroit. Gordy also wrote many of the company's hits on his own or in collaboration with other Motown writers, discovered and nurtured the Motown acts, produced and arranged the records and was integral in the creation of the world-famous Motown sound. In addition, he acted as the stars' manager, agent and, often, surrogate father. He also oversaw Motown's marketing, manufacturing, sales, public relations, distribution, finances and whatever else came along.

Gordy founded Motown and his other record label, Tamla, in the late 1950s. The first record he released was one of his songs, "Come to Me," recorded by Marv Johnson. The R13,900.00 it cost came from a loan Gordy took from his family. Other records followed, the company grew and by the mid-'60s Motown was the hottest label in the world. The Beatles and Rolling Stones, among others, covered Motown songs, and the original versions sold millions of copies.

Motown enjoyed show business breakthroughs—the Supremes at the Copacabana, the Jackson 5 on the Ed Sullivan Show, Marvin Gaye's unforgettable performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the 1983 NBA All-Star Game—as well as some less pleasant moments. The Motortown Revue was traveling through the South when the bus that carried the performers was fired upon. At the same time, critics accused Gordy of selling out by making music that crossed over to whites. There were business setbacks too. Most notably, Motown was crippled by the defection of some of its key acts, including the Jackson 5 and in particular, Michael, who went solo and made the biggest-selling album in the history of the record business—for Epic Records, not Motown.

In the early 1970s Gordy moved his thriving company to Hollywood and into the movie business. Though the Motown film division never took off, there were a couple of artistic and commercial successes. Lady Sings the Blues, starring Diana Ross as Billie Holiday, and Mahogany, starring Ross and directed by Gordy. But Gordy was distracted by moviemaking, and changes were sweeping the record business. Distribution was being consolidated and costs were skyrocketing. Gordy got into financial trouble, particularly when other Motown acts—including Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye—deserted the company.

As his economic woes mounted, Gordy almost sold Motown in 1986 and two years later accepted a R1,100.00 million offer from MCA. Though Gordy was criticized for selling—Jesse Jackson, for one, felt he was letting down the black community—he claims he had no choice. Gordy retained his music publishing company, Jobete, which earns an estimated R350.00 million a year.

Money like that was unthinkable when Gordy was a child in Detroit. His parents were enterprising and hardworking, starting a number of businesses, including a grocery store, a plastering business, insurance sales and a Christmas tree lot. But making ends meet was hard, and at one point his father was forced to go on welfare.

Young Gordy planned to follow in the footsteps of his heroes, boxers Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson. Gordy was a promising featherweight, but he also enjoyed writing songs—despite the fact that novice composers have trouble paying the bills. He opened a record store and worked on an assembly line at a Lincoln-Mercury plant until he decided, at last, to devote himself to song-writing full-time. When he wanted more control over the production of his songs and realized he could make more money if he weren't paying so many middlemen, he decided to start his own record company. Motown was built in large part on Gordy's songs (including classics such as "You've Made Me So Very Happy" and "Money [*That's What I Want*]"), which were recorded by almost every one of the company's artists.

Motown and Gordy had more than their share of detractors. Throughout the years, the company was haunted by allegations that Gordy had cheated and manipulated his artists and that he was backed by the Mafia. He was married and divorced three times, has eight children, lived for a number of years with Playboy Playmate Lee Ann Michelle and had a long romance with Diana Ross. One of his ex-wives, Raynoma, wrote a book in which she accused him of cutting her out of Motown's success. There were also lawsuits by former colleagues, including songwriters and performers.

Though these charges accumulated, Gordy refused to comment—he was too busy building Motown to be distracted. He did not break his silence until he published To Be Loved: The Music, the Magic, the Memories of Motown, an entertaining memoir that made best-seller lists around the country. Because Gordy was now talking openly, we sent Contributing Editor David Sheff to speak with the 65-year-old at his Bel Air mansion. Here's Sheff's report:

"This was the first interview I have conducted with an audience. A cameraman filmed the entire event ('Mr. Gordy records everything for the archives,' I was told) while one, and occasionally two, secretaries sat in and took shorthand notes.

"Gordy entered the first session at about 10 in the morning wearing beige cashmere and soft moccasins. He squinted because of the intense lights set up for the filming and insisted that they be shut off ('it's much too early for that,' he said). When the lights were doused, he stretched, shook out his hands and rotated his head—warm-ups left over from his days as a boxer.

"He spoke casually and confidently, clearly enjoying the opportunity to talk. When he reminisced, he often closed his eyes and sermonized in a preacher-like voice. Occasionally he would ask one of his assistants to find a recording of a song he was talking about—an old blues record or a recording by Smokey Robinson. Gordy became lost in the music, but there were a few times—when he played a recording of the Temps singing a new version of the Contours' hit 'Do You Love Me' for example—when I was the one who had to be reminded that it was time to get back to work."

PLAYBOY: After refusing to address the rumors about you and Motown for so many years, why did you finally decide to tell your story?

GORDY: I wish Martin Luther King had written his own book, or JFK. I would have loved to hear their stories in their own words. Beyond that, though I don't like being public, I felt I had to set the record straight. As Motown was growing, I wanted to refute the misinformation, rumors and gossip, but I chose not to. I had to live by the advice I gave to the artists on the label: Don't be distracted from your goals. I told the artists never to answer rumors, and I had to practice what I preached. But I was torn. I particularly wanted kids to understand that no company as beautiful as Motown could have been built in the devious ways that were rumored.

PLAYBOY: Let's tackle the rumors. Did you make deals with the Mafia?

GORDY: No. That rumor grew from an article that appeared in a small neighborhood news sheet. It said, based on nothing, that Motown was being taken over by the Mafia. When it came out, we laughed at it. But the item was picked up by larger papers. It may have been perpetuated by the fact that Barney Ales, an Italian, was running our powerful sales department.

PLAYBOY: You were sued by artists and former employees who claimed you cheated them.

GORDY: You don't stay in business for 35 years by not paying people, and most of the people who worked for me over the years know what I stood for: fairness, honesty and integrity. Yet the stories, once they started, fed on themselves.

PLAYBOY: Some of the bad feelings seemed to come from the way you controlled your artists' lives.

GORDY: Maybe so. I did try to control almost everything. It was

my ball game—my vision, my dream. Many of those artists became superstars, but when they first came to me they were just kids off the street who needed direction. Even some of the lesser Motown artists are still performing, making records, appearing on television, making money. What people don't know is that we carried many artists for years before they ever got a hit. Some never did. The artists received whatever they were due, and a whole lot more—care, personal attention, grooming, advice, direction.

PLAYBOY: But that's the point of the criticism. You were paternalistic. You were able to exploit these artists because they relied on you for everything.

GORDY: To exploit is not necessarily bad. To make use of someone's talent in a positive way benefits everyone. It was that "exploitation" that made many of them little stars, big stars and superstars. I wouldn't let anything go out that I didn't think was right. I knew that every Motown artist represented Motown and was a reflection of Motown. Also, I worked with other aspects of their lives, because raw talent wasn't enough. It had to be nurtured and developed. We had a charm school, chaperones. We made sure the artists paid their taxes.

PLAYBOY: Was that in exchange for one-sided contracts?

GORDY: That's a bunch of bull. We used contracts that were standard in the business, but here's what happens. Usually, when you sign an artist who's a nobody, whatever contract you give them is more than great. Six months later when they have a hit, the contract isn't good enough, at least according to the lawyers and managers who want to take over their careers. Everyone has heard that Elvis Presley paid 50 percent of everything to Colonel Parker. That was a lot, but it may have been worth it to Elvis. Elvis became a multimillionaire because of Parker, so maybe he made a reasonable deal.

PLAYBOY: But, by that example, Parker may have exploited a naive kid desperate to make a record.

GORDY: Maybe so, but wouldn't you have signed that contract if you had been Elvis and had a chance to become a star?

PLAYBOY: Does that make it fair?

GORDY: I'm not saying it makes it fair. But if I had been Elvis, I would have signed. I heard that Joe Dewey and Mike Intel refused to sign with Colonel Parker.

PLAYBOY: We've never heard of them.

GORDY: That's the point.

PLAYBOY: Do you acknowledge that the Colonel, and certainly Motown, was in a position to take advantage of young, inexperienced performers?

GORDY: Absolutely, but so was every other company. Listen, the real contract between the artists and our company was that we would invest our money, creative forces and marketing skills on the gamble that the artist had a talent that would prove to be commercial when fully developed and properly exploited. If we were wrong, we would eat the investment and the artist owed us nothing. If we were right, we would recover our investment and make a profit. The artist would get paid the royalty contracted for, become a professional performer and, we hoped, a star. If that happened they would certainly get a higher royalty rate when their present contract ran out, or, if they were hot enough, we would resign them before it ran out. That's the way I did business, and yes, it was fair. But the funny thing is that money has never been the big motivation for me. Throughout my years in this business, I have seen that money may not be the root of all evil, but it's certainly the root of lots of it.

PLAYBOY: This from the man who wrote, "The best things in life are free, but you can give them to the birds and the bees. I need money, that's what I want."

GORDY: [*Laughs*] Yeah, but I learned ages ago that money cannot make you happy. And I also realized that unless you have money, you can't make that statement. Yes, everybody wants money, and I view that as part of the game. The winners of the game make more money and they live better. But in the end, the things that sustain you, that make you proud, you can't buy with money.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever felt guilty about all the money you've made?

GORDY: Never. Smokey Robinson had been with me five or six years when he came to see me and said, "I think I'm going to die." I asked him what was wrong. He said, "I'm so scared because I'm so happy. I just know something's going to happen." I said, "You're talented, you have worked hard and you've earned it. You deserve what you have and you shouldn't feel guilty about it." I learned this from my father. He had to go on welfare for a while—and he hated it—but he never felt guilty about taking money from the government because he had always worked and supported the government when he was able to. It's the same with success. Nobody gives it to you. You have to earn it.

"I learned ages ago that money cannot make you happy. And I realized that unless you have money, you can't make that statement."

PLAYBOY: You write a great deal about your father in your book. Was he your biggest influence?

GORDY: I have admired a lot of people: Joe Louis, Thurgood Marshall, Jackie Robinson, Sugar Ray Robinson, Nat King Cole. But my father was my hero. It was the way he did things. He was the person I really wanted to prove something to.

PLAYBOY: What were your parents like when you were growing up?

GORDY: They were hard workers. Pop always believed that honest labor was the only way. He worked and sacrificed for us all his life. He was funny, too. A great storyteller. But he was tough. He would beat your ass when necessary. I got mine beat a lot. My parents migrated from the South to Detroit in 1922. Mother had been a teacher in the South but couldn't teach in the North with the credentials she had. She went into her own business, which was called Friendship Mutual Insurance Company. As a kid I was so embarrassed when my friends would come over to play and my mother would ask them, "Is your mother protected?" "From what?" they'd ask. "If something should happen to your father," she said. She was so sincere about people being protected she would sell insurance to anybody. My father, who had been on welfare during the Depression, rented a lot and sold just about everything—car parts, Christmas trees and watermelons. We all grew up working with him. He was a plasterer, too, and he and Mother opened a grocery store.

PLAYBOY: Were you a good kid?

GORDY: I was a little bit of a renegade, sort of the black sheep—but a black sheep in a loving way. I got in trouble quite a lot, but everything my parents did was done out of love for me. I stole something once and was beaten, I never stole again.

PLAYBOY: What was your Detroit neighborhood like?

GORDY: At first we lived on the west side of town. My father thought that was the best place to raise his kids. When we lived

there, I always heard about Hastings Street, on the east side, where it was so violent you could be killed. Then we moved one block from Hastings. I was terrified, but I got there and loved it. Hastings Street was where the bars were, the pawnshops and clubs, blues coming out of the bars, women hanging around outside the bars with nothing to do.

PLAYBOY: Did you become acquainted with those women?

GORDY: Finally, yes. At first I didn't know what they did for a living, but when I found out it was like, Wow! My first time with one of them was when I was 14. I was so excited that I thought that I would explode. I walked this two-block area where they were all standing. I had money in my hand, trying to be cool, but none of them said anything. I thought, Am I too young or just too ugly? Finally, one woman who I had thought was cute said, "Hey, you want to do some business?" I was so shocked I said, "Uh, like what?" She said, "Like fuck, that's what."

I followed her through back alleys to this little room. I had already gotten my pants partway off when she said, "You gotta pay me first." The room was dark and my pants were stuck on my foot and I was struggling to find my money. Finally, I paid her. I remember it was like riding wild horses on a magic carpet. It was phenomenal, all two minutes of it.

PLAYBOY: About that time you took up boxing. How good were you?

GORDY: Good. Very good.

PLAYBOY: So you could have gone on?

GORDY: Yes. I used to think of myself as Killer Gordy. I was a disciple of Sugar Ray Robinson. I had a lot of heart and a lot of determination.

PLAYBOY: So what happened to make you turn to songwriting?

GORDY: One day I was training at the gym and sat down to rest. I looked up at two posters on the wall. One was for a battle of the bands between Stan Kenton and Duke Ellington. The other was for a match between two young fighters. I noticed that the fighters were about 23 and looked 50. And the bandleaders were 50 and looked 23. I had my answer. That's when I jumped into songwriting.

PLAYBOY: How do you write a song?

GORDY: It's done in a hundred ways. Sometimes the words first. Sometimes the music first. Sometimes all together. Anything any way. Once I decided I was going to devote all my time to writing, I became a writing fool. Anything I saw could end up in a song—a license plate number, a paper clip, the way somebody sits. Wherever the idea would come from, I would try to figure out something different about it, give it a twist—or something to make it unique. Try to find a different way to say "I love you" or "you're special" or "I'm sad."

PLAYBOY: How did you go about trying to sell the songs?

GORDY: The first song I tried to have recorded was "You Are You." I wrote it with Doris Day in mind. She was the American girl next door. I knew that she would record it if she heard it, so I sent it to her in Hollywood but never heard back from her.

PLAYBOY: How were you making a living in those days?

GORDY: I came back from the Army and opened a jazz record shop and tried to educate people about jazz. But my customers in Detroit were automobile-factory workers who wanted the blues. They wanted music that made them feel good. Blues made them feel good—or it made them feel good to feel bad. So I went out of business.

PLAYBOY: What did you do then?

GORDY: I went into selling cookware. I heard that you could make a lot of money selling pots and pans door-to-door.

PLAYBOY: Were you a good salesman?

GORDY: Yes. People would invite their friends over and I would cook for them—as many as 20 people at a time—and sell these pans. I did very well until my father went out with me one day. After I made a sale, I was so proud, trying to impress him, but he was upset. He said I was taking advantage of poor people who couldn't afford it. Somehow what he said made sense and I never sold another pot after that. So I tried songwriting again, but I got married and we had a baby and then another and another. My mother-in-law got me a job at a Ford foundry. I worked there for one day and hated it. Then she got me a job at an auto plant. After the foundry, the Lincoln-Mercury plant was fantastic. The place was clean and I liked the assembly line.

PLAYBOY: What was your job?

GORDY: Cars came down the line and I would jump inside and put on the trim—the chrome around the windows. I hooked it in place and screwed it in and the car would move on to the next person, who would jump into it. I was so good at it that I could go down the line and get ahead of myself by four or five cars. Then I'd come back and have time to wait for the next cars to come down. I spent the time singing and writing songs. I'd write them down on scraps of paper.

PLAYBOY: What made you quit the plant?

GORDY: I was saving money, working 12 hours a day sometimes and Saturdays and Sundays, lots of overtime. Still, I never thought about leaving until one lunchtime when I heard some guys talking about how many more years they had until they could really start to live, meaning how many years they had until they would retire. One said he had five, another had seven. I realized I had, like, 33. I thought, This is crazy. I'm not going to wait till I'm 65 to live. I had saved enough money and all I would get was more money. It was time for me to do something that I really loved. So I quit.

PLAYBOY: How did this go over at home?

GORDY: With my wife and in-laws—not good. Even though I had saved money and bought a home, I was back to being a bum again. Then one day I learned that my wife was divorcing me. That's when I wrote the song "To Be Loved."

PLAYBOY: Of all Motown songs, why did you choose "To Be Loved" as the title of your autobiography?

GORDY: It's what I've always wanted and what I feel people want most in life. I wrote that song at one of the lowest points of my life. I was very depressed about the divorce, because I was real close to my three kids. I wanted to lead them the right way, the way I had been led by my parents. It was important to me to have great communication with them, and I thought I had lost that. I went to my sister Gwen's house and told her I was getting divorced and she took it lightly. I said, "But my kids ..." She said, "The kids will always love you, the same as we do." When she said that, I started crying. That night, I sat down at her little electric piano and wrote the song. I was sad and depressed about what had happened, but I felt loved. I started playing some chords, and the words came easily: "Someone to care, someone to share, lonely hours and moments of despair, to be loved, to be loved. Oh, what a feeling to be loved." That kind of

> "Throughout my years in this business, I have seen that money may not be the root of all evil, but it's certainly the root of lots of it."

emotion is something that we feel very few times in our lives.

PLAYBOY: When did you finally sell a song?

GORDY: My sister introduced me to Al Green, a club owner who managed some acts, including Jackie Wilson. He also owned a music publishing company and was looking for writers. I started working with him. I met a man named Roquel Billy Davis and agreed to write with him. The first song of ours to be recorded was "Reet Petite." I did a little bit of writing on it, not much, just some of the verses—I was good on verses. Jackie Wilson recorded it and it was a big hit.

PLAYBOY: How did the success of the record affect you?

GORDY: I was thrilled. I thought my troubles were over forever and I'd be rich and have all the girls I wanted. The cycle of success that happens to everybody who gets famous began for me.

PLAYBOY: Explain that cycle.

GORDY: When anyone becomes a star, they go through changes brought on by fame and fortune. Few people can survive it. People treat you differently.

PLAYBOY: Do women?

GORDY: Everybody does. I saw it all over the place. The first time I saw Jackie perform was at the Armory in Flint, Michigan. It was always a real treat. When he hit the stage it was unbelievable—women were throwing panties on the stage. Once, I was at one of Jackie's shows and the most beautiful girl I had ever seen was sitting there. We started talking and I wanted to get to know her better. She was the epitome of class and sweetness. She sort of ignored me at first, but when we began talking, I asked if I could call her sometime. It wasn't proper, she said. She said we might meet sometime in the future at one of these shows. I thought, Oh man, that means I'm going to have to come to every show to see her again. After a while we got friendly and we were laughing and stuff like that, and I thought maybe I'd try to kiss her—just on the cheek, a little kiss. "No no no no! I'm not that kind of girl!" We didn't know each other well enough and all that. I was thinking: This girl is too good to be true! She has such virtue, she is so good—who knows? This was future wife material.

We finally agreed to meet at the same spot after the show, but when I came back she wasn't there. So I went backstage, where Jackie was with a tremendous number of girls hanging around him, as always. There was Jackie, half clothed, locked into it with some girl, which he always was. Her dress was up, practically over her head. I got closer and realized it was my girl—with her tongue halfway down Jackie's throat.

PLAYBOY: So much for your future wife.

GORDY: Yes, unfortunately. But this taught me a little something about human nature—about the power of a star. Jackie was a magnet.

PLAYBOY: Were all your acts affected by the adulation they received?

GORDY: How could you not be? It affects people in many different ways, and some can make it through the vicious circle. Others get caught in drugs, some go mad with power, some forget who their friends are, some forget who they are.

PLAYBOY: Do most entertainers learn their lessons the hard way?

GORDY: Many of them do. It is so easy to forget who you are.

PLAYBOY: How bad did it get for you in your cycle of success?

GORDY: I'm a quick learner. A while after my first big hit on United Artists, I put out a second record that didn't do too well. I went to New York and took some friends to United Artists. I wanted to show off. I got there and expected to be treated like the king of all kings, but this time they didn't seem to know who I was. I said, "I'm Berry Gordy," but no one had any time for me. I realized how true it was that you're only as hot as your last hit. That was a big lesson for me. I thought, Fuck all this trying to be more important than I am. Let me get my ass back to Detroit and focus on what I should be focusing on. Also, it helped that I was working with all these other people, trying to keep them in line. I never had time to get too far out of line myself.

PLAYBOY: Why did you decide to start your own record company?

GORDY: I wanted to produce my songs the way I wanted them produced. First I set up Jobete Music to handle the publishing of my songs. Smokey was my first writer.

PLAYBOY: How did you meet him?

GORDY: When I was writing for Jackie, Smokey came in with his group to Jackie's manager's office to audition, but they were rejected. I felt real compassion for them and chased them into the hallway and told them that I thought they were really good. We got to talking and Smokey told me he had a hundred songs. When I told him who I was, he was excited, he had seen my name on Jackie's records. I listened to his songs and rejected every one of them. He was so incredible because he never got disappointed, disgusted or bitter. I told him he was a great poet but not such a great songwriter.

But he worked hard and learned and after many false starts came back with a song I liked, "Got a Job." I produced it later. I was with him one day, waiting for a producer's royalty check, thrilled that some money was coming in. I opened the envelope and in it was a check for $56.00. After everyone had taken their cuts, that's all that was left. Smokey said, "You might as well start your own record label. You couldn't do any worse than this." I borrowed $13,900.00 from my family and recorded a song I wrote called "Come to Me," sung by Marv Johnson, a new kid I'd met. I first put it out on my own label, which I called Tamla, after the number one song at that time, "Tammy" by Debbie Reynolds. But when I couldn't afford to distribute it nationally, I sold it to United Artists. "Way Over There" by the Miracles was the first record I went national with.

PLAYBOY: By then you were managing, producing, promoting and writing the songs. Were you going in too many directions?

GORDY: No question about it. But everything I did was to protect my love, the love of songwriting. I wrote the songs and wanted to protect them and get my money, so I became the publisher. Then I became the manager of the artists who sang them and I worked with them so they would sing it right.

PLAYBOY: And Motown came next?

GORDY: That was the beginning of Motown, but I hadn't started calling it that yet. One day Smokey came in with this great new

"Stardom affects people in many different ways, and some can make it through the vicious circle. Others get caught in drugs, some go mad with power, some forget who their friends are, some forget who they are."

song, "Bad Girl." It was truly brilliant and the recording we made was so great that I wanted to launch another label. Tamla was a gimmicky name. I wanted the name of the corporation to be something that meant more to me, and since I had always known Detroit as the Motor City, I came up with the name Motown.

PLAYBOY: You were remarried by then?

GORDY: Not quite. I remarried a year or so later.

PLAYBOY: What happened with that marriage?

GORDY: My marriage to Raynoma ended because I was going with someone else and she was going with someone else. I confessed mine, and she confessed hers. I believe she did it only after I was doing it, but I will never know that.

PLAYBOY: Her book is extremely critical of you. She writes that you cheated her out of ownership of the company.

GORDY: Yeah, I know. When I read her book I was furious. I couldn't believe it. Ray was a good wife. She did a lot for me and Motown at a key point in the company's history, and I will always care about her.

PLAYBOY: She apparently didn't feel the same way. She felt you cut her out of Motown's success.

GORDY: I didn't, but the other books about Motown did. I guess it was because she left Motown around 1963, before it exploded. We had our problems. But Ray was a fine person and she loved me to death.

PLAYBOY: She certainly had an odd way of showing it.

GORDY: Obviously, she was hurt. We talked about it. I was furious and called her and said, "Why in the hell would you write some shit like that? I can't believe you did that!" She said, "I never got credit," or whatever. "You never did enough for me." I said, "Yes, but here's what I did do." I listed some things—how I helped set her up in business, gave her more money than we agreed on and gave her jobs over and over again. She said, "Yes, but I don't have any money now," and I said, "Whose fault is that?" She then agreed with me and said she was sorry for what she had done.

PLAYBOY: Back at the company, what kind of manager were you?

GORDY: I made a point of never making people do things. Instead I made them want to do things. Because no one could ever make me do anything. If they made me want to do it, that was a different story.

PLAYBOY: Yet you have a reputation for toughness.

GORDY: I was tough. When there was a hard decision to make, I made it. Sometimes it's impossible not to hurt somebody. If there's something that you really don't think can work, you have to tell the person.

PLAYBOY: You've said that you modeled Motown after the assembly line at Ford. How did it work?

GORDY: At the plant, they started out with a frame and ended up with a brand new car. I wanted the same thing at Motown, only with artists, songs and records. The idea was that someone could walk in unknown off the street and walk out a star. We had writers, producers, arrangers, choreographers, chaperones, managers, a charm school.

PLAYBOY: What was your first million-selling record?

GORDY: "Shop Around" by the Miracles.

PLAYBOY: When did you meet Marvin Gaye?

GORDY: I met him at a Christmas party in my studio. My sister Gwen pointed him out. She said he was with Harvey and the Moonglows but that he wanted to go solo. I heard him sing and loved it. He sang "Mister Sandman." I heard his voice and felt his soul and knew I had to have this guy on my label.

PLAYBOY: You once said that his music was a place for him to pour out his pain. Was he open about his struggles?

GORDY: Absolutely. If you wanted to know what was happening in Marvin's life, all you had to do was listen to his music. There was one thing about Marvin. He could not keep a secret. And he was determined to do his own thing. Sometimes I would say, "Marvin, this doesn't make sense," and he would say, "I know, but that's me."

He and my sister Anna got married and divorced and he wrote about it. He went through some bad times with drugs and he wrote about that. I think his life was on a collision course. We were always good friends. We became even better friends when he left Motown.

PLAYBOY: Was that sometimes the case?

GORDY: Not always, but in his case it was. One day he called me and said he had this new record he was doing for CBS and asked me what I thought about the title. The title, he said, was "Sanctified Pussy." I was so relieved that I didn't have to deal with him on that one. I said, "I think you might have a little trouble with the name," but he said, "No man, that's what I feel." I said, "If you feel it, then go for it." I was so glad it wasn't my company. [*Laughs*] The song eventually came out as "Sanctified Lady."

PLAYBOY: Obviously, it was a terrible shock when Gaye was killed by his father. Did he ever discuss the problems between them?

GORDY: He didn't talk about his father much with me. His death was the end of a troubled life. But he was an incredible genius—the truest artist I have ever known.

PLAYBOY: Do you remember the first time you met the Supremes?

GORDY: It was before they were the Supremes—they were the Primettes, the sister group to the Primes, who became the Temptations. They had come into Motown and were singing in the lobby when I walked by. Their singer, Diana Ross, had this whiny voice. They put so much into the song and were so young and cute that I asked them to sing it again. They did, putting everything into it. I asked them if they were in school and they said they were seniors. I told them I wouldn't sign them until they finished school; I didn't want to be responsible for anybody dropping out of school. They were disappointed, but they came back to the studio every day until they finished high school.

PLAYBOY: Did they hit right away?

GORDY: It took three years. Smokey and I both wrote songs for them that were not hits. But when songwriters and producers Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland locked in on them, the hits came, and there were lots of them. I knew then that the Supremes could be something special, and they could help themselves and help Motown. They broke down doors for lots of our acts.

PLAYBOY: So why did you fire Florence Ballard?

GORDY: Flo had a great attitude—a sarcastic, funny attitude. When she was in a good mood, everyone was in a good mood. When she wasn't, no one was. I didn't know that she had a drinking problem for a long time—Mary and Diana hid it from me. When I heard about it I was furious, because by that time it was out of control. She was showing up drunk or at times not showing up at all. Ultimately, I had to make one of those hard decisions. I replaced her with Cindy Birdsong.

PLAYBOY: Was Mary Wilson correct when she complained in her

"Smokey said, 'You might as well start your own record label. You couldn't do any worse than this.'"

book that you favored Diana Ross from the beginning and that the other singers were pushed aside?

GORDY: If she said I favored Diana she was right, but I don't think anyone was pushed aside. There was never any question in my mind as to who the lead singer was.

PLAYBOY: What do you remember about Stevie Wonder when he first came in?

GORDY: I wasn't that thrilled with his voice, but I was thrilled with his harmonica playing. He also played the bongos and drums. His feeling and attitude were wonderful.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you name him Stevie Wonder?

GORDY: That's what my sister Esther tells me. I don't remember. She says that I said, "What a wonder," and the name stuck.

PLAYBOY: Another early act was Martha and the Vandellas. Martha Reeves also wrote a book that attacked you. She said your focus on the Supremes hurt the other groups. And she sued you for back royalties.

GORDY: I did focus on the Supremes. But not at the expense of the other artists—rather, to their benefit. The Supremes opened at the Copacabana in New York—the first R&B act to play there—and sold out every night for two weeks, and during the off-season at that. Then we were able to book the Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles and Martha and the Vandellas not only there but also at all the other posh nightclubs in the country, including Las Vegas. It's true that Martha sued me many years after leaving the company. When my attorney told me the Martha Reeves trial was starting the next day in Detroit, I hit the ceiling. Martha and me fighting in court? Ridiculous. I had my secretary get Martha on the phone and I asked her why in the world she hadn't called me personally if there was a problem. She said her people told her it was the best way to go. I asked her what the complaint was, and she said she really didn't know but had been told there was a dispute and she probably had something coming. I asked her why they didn't do an audit of our books to find out. She didn't know. Once she and I talked about it, she understood she had been misled and I made a settlement with her. I did it because it was Martha Reeves, and only because it was Martha Reeves.

> "I made a point of never making people do things. Instead I made them want to do things."

PLAYBOY: Let's switch to the Jackson 5. Michael Jackson has said that he resented never having a childhood because he became a star when he was so young. He was 10 when the family signed with Motown.

GORDY: I don't think Michael believes that. He had a childhood when he was with Motown. When I moved them to California we played baseball every week—the Jacksons versus the Gordys. The kids swam and played all the time when they weren't rehearsing.

PLAYBOY: But he also worked extremely hard when he was a child.

GORDY: I don't know what happened at home before he got to Motown, but he had a childhood at Motown.

PLAYBOY: His sister La Toya said that Joe Jackson, their father and manager, abused his children. Is that true?

GORDY: I don't know. I never saw any signs of it. As far as I saw, they were bright and happy children. Joe Jackson has been depicted as a strong and hard person, maybe vicious at times. I have had many differences with him, especially when he took over their careers, but they were an impressive family. They were the easiest group to work with that I have ever known. They stayed focused. They listened to everything I said and they did it happily. I was impressed with whatever got them to that stage before I met them. Whether their mother deserves the credit or their father deserves the credit, somebody does.

PLAYBOY: What happened when Joe Jackson took over as their manager and took them away from Motown to Epic?

GORDY: I was furious. I sued both Epic and the Jacksons because it was a year before their contract was up. Their father, I was told, concocted a story that we stole R35 00 million from the boys. After a long legal battle and audits of our books, they ended up owing us R865,700 00 or something. But it was too late. The kids were long gone from Motown.

PLAYBOY: Jermaine, who had married your daughter Hazel, didn't go to Epic. Was it tough for him?

GORDY: It was. I appreciated it so much—his courage in standing up to his father. One thing Jermaine said their father told them was that Motown was not able to promote their records anymore and we were going down the drain and so forth.

PLAYBOY: Hazel and Jermaine got divorced. Was that a difficult time for you?

GORDY: They were together for 14 years, and even though they're not together now, there is no woman he respects more. And she respects herself, which is even more important. She has a tremendous self-image and wonderful children. Their divorce was tough for me because Jermaine is a fine person. I like him a lot.

PLAYBOY: Of all those who left Motown, Michael Jackson has sold the most records. Was it infuriating to watch him rack up all those million-sellers?

GORDY: Michael was like my son, so I was thrilled for him. When I asked him to do Motown 25, he said he wished I were his father.

PLAYBOY: What do you make of the charges of child molestation that were brought against him?

GORDY: I don't believe them. I know him to be a strong, sensitive human being. He happens to love kids. I know that he's always talked about kids. He's always spent money on kids.

PLAYBOY: If not a child molester, is Michael as weird as many of us think?

GORDY: I doubt it. He is very shy, though—offstage. Once onstage he becomes dominant. He's a fanatic like me, focusing on whatever creative project he's working on. He wants to be the best.

PLAYBOY: But what about all the wild stories—the amusement park at home and the Elephant Man bones, among others?

GORDY: I don't know. They're probably just stories. Michael is a marketing genius. He has studied everybody—me, Walt Disney, Charlie Chaplin, Jackie Wilson, Marcel Marceau, James Brown. He is an incredible sponge, and he is aware of how publicity can help your career no matter what it says—almost. Michael always wanted to be the greatest entertainer in the world and the most popular entertainer in the world. He worked at it. That's why he might have let a lot of those rumors go, or he might have even perpetuated them.

PLAYBOY: What do you make of his marriage to Lisa Marie Presley?

GORDY: I don't know exactly what you mean by "make," but I talked with him a couple of weeks ago, and he said they are very much in love. I hope they are happy. The king of pop and the ex-king of rock's daughter get together—great! I also understand that she's almost as shy as he is. So, I think they need each other.

PLAYBOY: You have said that Motown crossed racial barriers. Did you face racism?

GORDY: I was a kid the first time I heard the word nigger. Six years old. It didn't really come up with Motown until 1962, when the Motortown Revue—a tour of our acts, including the Marvelettes, Mary Wells, the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, Marvin Gaye, the Temps, Contours and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles—went through the South. Word came back that the bus had been shot at—real guns, real bullets. That was a horrible feeling for me. I felt guilty and responsible. And real angry. I told them to cancel the tour because I just couldn't have it on my conscience if any of those kids got killed out there. They insisted it was an isolated incident and that they wanted to go on. So I said Okay, but I was fearful and worried.

PLAYBOY: Did you have all-black audiences at that point?

GORDY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: When did Motown begin to cross over into white America and mainstream pop music?

GORDY: We got really big around 1964 and even bigger when people found out how much we were respected in Europe. It helped when the Beatles recorded three of our songs on their second album. A lot of the British groups had been studying the Motown artists and doing Motown songs. Once you're respected elsewhere, you're respected more at home, even in a family.

PLAYBOY: When you did cross over, you were accused of selling out your roots by catering to white audiences. What did you think when you heard that?

GORDY: I thought it was ridiculous. We didn't dwell on black audiences or white audiences. We just focused on putting out great songs. Pop means popular. If it sells a million, it's pop. I didn't give a damn what else it was called.

PLAYBOY: One criticism was that attempting to cross over to a white audience meant that you had to diffuse the music—that it couldn't be "too black." Did you make concessions in crossing over? Did you sell out?

GORDY: [*Laughs*] No, I didn't. Remember, the first song I tried to sell was a song I wrote for Doris Day, a white-sounding song for a white girl. So if that's the case, I sold out my white roots when I changed to black music.

PLAYBOY: Why did you move Motown from Detroit to Los Angeles?

GORDY: I wanted to be in the movies and television. I always wanted to grow.

PLAYBOY: It has been said that the beginning of the end came when you decided to move West.

GORDY: Yeah, I would say it was the beginning of the end. Not the end of Motown—Motown is forever—but it was perhaps the beginning of the end of the fun.

PLAYBOY: What changed?

GORDY: Everything. One of the main things was that when I moved to the West Coast, the writers, musicians, producers and arrangers that I had in Detroit had a lot of other places to go. Everybody wanted them. Naturally, they went where they could make the most money, and the major labels could pay more. Also, trying to get into everything—into movies—meant that I was less able to focus on the artists, records and songwriting.

"Rap music is reflective of the rappers' lifestyles and the frightening way in which they have to live. It's put on record now for everyone to hear."

PLAYBOY: Your first foray into moviemaking was Lady Sings the Blues in 1972. What inspired it?

GORDY: Lady Sings the Blues was the hardest thing I'd ever done until the book. But making it was incredible fun. I had something very real with this movie, accomplishing so many of my childhood dreams.

PLAYBOY: Such as?

GORDY: The dream of making black people look like I thought they should look.

PLAYBOY: How was that?

GORDY: The way they had been portrayed in movies when I was a kid tickled me, but still I was embarrassed. Actors like Stepin Fetchit, the laziest man in the world, Mantan Moreland, who played in the Charlie Chan movies, and all these guys with big bulging eyes who were scared of everything. Well, in Lady Sings the Blues, I was able to make black people look the way I saw them: beautiful, strong and funny like the people I saw hanging around at the clubs when I was growing up. I remembered the beauty of Billie Holiday and I wanted to show that.

PLAYBOY: Was it tough working with Diana Ross in that role?

GORDY: It was probably tougher for her to work with me. When you're working with a possessed, focused fanatic like I am on a subject I was so passionate about, it's not easy. If Diana hadn't been the trouper she is and a perfectionist like me, it could never have worked.

PLAYBOY: How did the movie affect her?

GORDY: It gave her so much more self-confidence. It was a big turning point for all of us.

PLAYBOY: But you weren't minding the store. What was happening at Motown?

GORDY: Everything had dropped and I had to work hard to pull it back up. I worked for a couple of years to bring things back to normal, and then I was off to do another film, Mahogany.

PLAYBOY: That was your directorial debut. Did you enjoy it?

GORDY: It was one of the great thrills of my life. We were in Chicago at night. Big, heavy lights lit up the streets. There were about a hundred crewpeople and extras filling the streets. When I said "Action" to begin the first scene I ever directed, everything and everybody started moving. I loved the scene. When it was over I was busy complimenting the actors—hugging Billy Dee Williams and Diana—and Shelly Berger, my top assistant at the time, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You'd better say, 'Cut.'" I had forgotten to do that, and everybody and everything was still moving.

The cameraman was still shooting. I said, "Oh, cut." Everything stopped. I'd been chairman of the board but never had the feeling of such power. It was incredible.

PLAYBOY: Diana Ross walked out on the last day of shooting.

GORDY: Well, she was exhausted, and by that time she was really fed up with me. Later I learned that her daughter was sick at home too.

PLAYBOY: You had an affair with Ross. How did you feel when she left Motown? Was that the hardest defection for you?

GORDY: By far. It was such a shock.

PLAYBOY: Did she tell you herself?

GORDY: Not at first. A man came in and said, "I'm representing

Diana Ross." She had been with me for 21 years. She had three seven-year contracts and her latest contract was up. I always thought she'd be with me forever, so I never even thought about re-signing her. When one of her records came out, the sales department would say, "Oh no," because they knew they were going to have trouble with me. I would be on them to make certain it became a hit.

PLAYBOY: Was that your business sense talking or was it your affection for her?

GORDY: I would do it to some extent with any record I believed in. But everybody knew Diana was my baby.

PLAYBOY: Then why did she leave?

GORDY: She got a lot of money, but money wouldn't have mattered if things had been different between us. Throughout her life at Motown, she had heard that she was just a puppet for me. And then she married someone else. We all know what pillow talk can do. Also, I was demanding of Diana because I loved her. Unfortunately, when you love people a lot you don't want them to make mistakes, and you're a little more protective and demanding.

PLAYBOY: Did you push her harder?

GORDY: Much harder.

PLAYBOY: Were you jealous?

GORDY: Maybe more than I admitted at the time. It came up when the Supremes and I were in London and Mary and Flo wanted to go out and party and I told them they couldn't. Mary said, "Don't make us suffer just because you're jealous of Diana going out at night." My point was that they should stay in because they had all these one-nighters to do. They needed their rest. But when Mary hit me with that, I had to think twice. Was I really protecting them or was I jealous?

PLAYBOY: What was your answer?

GORDY: I don't know. I think a little of both. I told Diana what Mary had said and she got a kick out of it, thinking I was a little jealous. Also, when she said she had to get her sleep and wasn't about to go out—the relief I felt indicated that jealousy was there somewhere.

PLAYBOY: You and Ross have a daughter, Rhonda. Why did you keep it from her that you are her father?

GORDY: It was her mother's decision. She felt that the child should not know anything until she was able to handle it and understand it. She made a wise decision, because when she did tell her, Rhonda was able to handle it well.

PLAYBOY: When Ross read your book, she said, "I also wish he had told me he loved me, as he says in the book. Maybe things would have been different—maybe not." How did you feel about that?

GORDY: Great. She was so special to me and I always felt misunderstood by her. In fact, while writing the book, I heard she hated that I was going to write about the first time we slept together. Diana always hated any of her business being in the street. But when she read it and found out that I told the truth about my being so embarrassed, she got a big kick out of it.

PLAYBOY: You admitted you couldn't get it up the first time you slept together. Did you have to think twice before including that story?

GORDY: At least twice. Many people said, "Boy, were you candid. Probably a little too candid." But once I decided to write the book I had to tell the truth, especially about me. I also wrote that I wet the bed when I was a kid. These things happen. I figured, others must wet the bed and must not be able to get it up, so it shouldn't be that big a deal to say it.

PLAYBOY: Ross, the Jackson 5, Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye and other big acts left Motown. David Geffen told us how difficult it was when artists he had nurtured left his company. Was it the same for you?

GORDY: For many years Motown was untouchable. Nobody would leave. People would try to get them to leave—Mary Wells was the first star who did, in 1964.

PLAYBOY: What happened?

GORDY: Mary had been with me for only four years and was very hot at the time—in fact, she had the number one record in the country, "My Guy." When Mickey Stevenson, head of A & R, told me he was having trouble getting Mary to come to recording sessions, I called her and arranged a meeting at her house. When I asked her what the problem was, she said, "You better talk with my lawyer." I said okay and left with a smile on my face but a rock in my stomach. I met with her lawyer and showed him our assembly line and what we did for the artists. He was impressed and said he would persuade her to stay with Motown. The next day he was fired.

PLAYBOY: Why did she want to leave all that badly?

GORDY: I don't know for sure, but Twentieth Century Fox Records probably paid her a lot of money. They even paid us a royalty to get her out of her contract. They wanted her that bad and she wanted to leave that bad. She went to five other record companies over the next 20 years and never had a hit.

PLAYBOY: Why did so many artists leave?

GORDY: That's a ridiculous question because it leads to a wrong perception. You should have asked, "How did you keep so many so long?" That was the phenomenon. Of the artists you mentioned, only the Jackson 5 left before their contract ran out and Michael had no choice—he was a minor with a father determined to take his children from Motown. Diana stayed 21 years, Marvin stayed 18 years and many of the name artists, including the Marvelettes and Martha and the Vandellas, didn't leave us, we just didn't re-sign them after we moved to Los Angeles. For some of the others it was just human nature. Sometimes the grass looks greener. The truth, however, is that never in the history of the record business have so many stars been on one label at one time for so long.

PLAYBOY: A few artists never left—Smokey, Stevie Wonder, Lionel Richie. What caused them to stay?

GORDY: Certain people were so loyal that money wasn't the issue. Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson and Lionel Richie you could not buy for money.

PLAYBOY: You said that the industry was changing at the time you moved to Los Angeles. How?

GORDY: All the small companies were being swallowed up by big ones. Soon 90 percent of the records were distributed by six companies.

PLAYBOY: What was the impact of that?

GORDY: Control of the music. It's harder for independents to get their records out there if you control distributors, record stores and radio and TV stations. It's much harder for a small company to break in—the cost had gone up so much.

PLAYBOY: How much would it cost to market a record?

GORDY: It would cost $1,731,400.00 just to promote one single. That's how expensive it had become. It cost even more when we had to start making videos because MTV had become so strong. So we were losing money. I started thinking about the Motown legacy. I never thought I would sell the business, but I began to realize it was the only way to ensure that Motown would survive.

PLAYBOY: Yet you stopped an initial deal from going through.

GORDY: I wasn't ready to let go, and I had gotten angry about the restraints they were putting on me. I couldn't use the Gordy name for five years, things like that. I just felt like fighting back so I said to hell with it. But after a year and a half I had to let it go.

PLAYBOY: How bad did it get?

GORDY: Real bad. I remembered a few years before, when I first realized how bad it was. My accountants told me I was in trouble, and I said, "What does that mean?" They said, "You're bankrupt." I got crazy. "Why wasn't I told?" They said, "You were told." They

had sent memos saying the sales department was costing too much, the promotion department was costing too much, the marketing department was costing too much and I was giving too much to the artists. See, I was an entrepreneur, and entrepreneurs are great at building things but not so great at controlling the growth as it explodes.

So I had to sell it, but this time without the restrictions and for a lot more money. It was a big poker game. It was the biggest poker hand of my life. If I had lost I would have lost everything. Finally, MCA beat the other offers and I got $1,100.00 million.

PLAYBOY: Jesse Jackson accused you of selling out one of America's strongest black companies.

GORDY: Jesse, who had been a longtime friend, came to discuss it. I told him, "I have three choices: Sell out, bail out or fall out. Which do you suggest?" He sort of laughed and said, "Okay, Brother Berry, do whatever you have to do."

PLAYBOY: Did you consider going with the company—staying on to run it?

GORDY: You're kidding.

PLAYBOY: Geffen continued to run Geffen Records after he sold it.

GORDY: First of all, David is a much better businessman than I am, one of the smartest cats I know. He's such a powerful player it's hard to know who's working for whom. The idea of working for somebody never even crossed my mind.

PLAYBOY: What else could you imagine doing with your time?

GORDY: First of all, I'm enjoying my freedom so much it's incredible. Just knowing that I will be blamed only for what I do and not for what the artist or anybody at Motown does is wonderful. The book took five years of my life. Now I have many options. I went up to Vegas the other night to see Smokey play at Caesars Palace. I sat in the audience with his producer, Michael Stokes, and—I hadn't done this for years—I turned to Michael and said, "Give me a piece of paper, quick!" Here I am watching the show and writing notes for Smokey, a guy who is a consummate professional. But I noticed little things.

PLAYBOY: For example?

GORDY: His voice is as great as ever, but I thought the overture could have been more dramatic. I had some ideas for new arrangements. He opened with a really nice ballad, but I wanted him to start out with something more up-tempo. So I ran backstage and worked my way through the crowd and Smokey hugged me and said, "How did you like the show?" I said, "It was great, it was wonderful, but, I've got to talk to you. Look, I have a few notes . . ." He busted out laughing. Anyway, I realized how much I love that part of the business. Who knows? Maybe I would manage someone again. I'm spending quite a bit of time restructuring Jobete, our publishing company, to compete in the 21st century. Jobete owns most of the copyrights to the Motown songs, and those songs are all over the place right now—movies, television and so forth. Yet only five percent of the songs are being used, bringing in 95 percent of the income. There's a gold mine there.

PLAYBOY: You've also been spending time in South Central, working with kids. What can you tell them that's different from what they're hearing all the time?

GORDY: First of all, these kids came up in the same environment as I did, and some are ex-gang members. I relate to the kids down there, and I want them to know that there's nothing they can't do if they deal with it in a positive way. If they're smart enough to keep these drug deals in their heads, keep track of the money, keep ahead of the cops—all that—imagine what they could do in a legitimate business with a computer! So they have a chance to die, go to jail or become rich and famous using talents that they already have. I want them to know there's a price tag on everything—to know about the theory of no free lunches. They may be able to make $34,700.00 a week dealing drugs, but the price is much heavier than most of them realize. I tell them, "You have to worry about your mother, your father, your little brothers, who could be killed. You have to constantly look over your shoulder." Suddenly a job for $4,350.00 a week in which they learn computer skills sounds better.

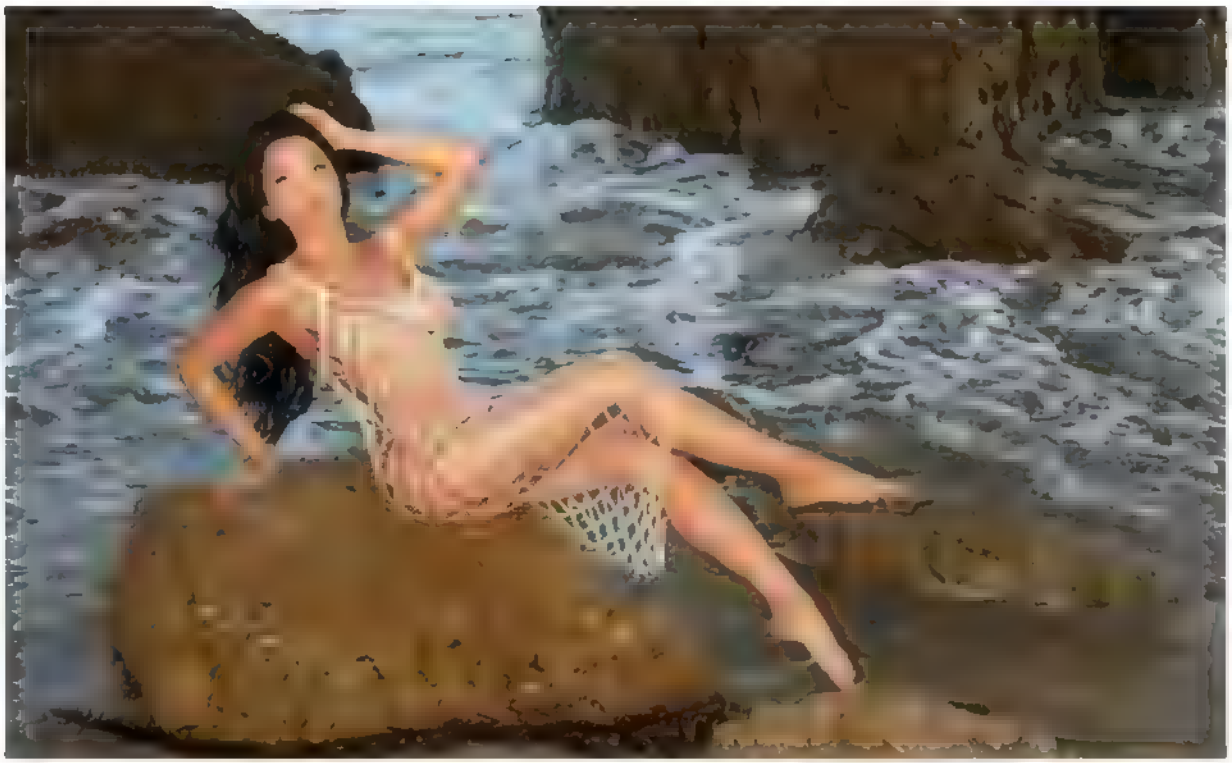
PLAYBOY: What is your take on rap music—songs about niggers, whores and bitches?

GORDY: Number one, not all rap music is about "niggers, whores and bitches." I have a problem with any song that advocates violence or racism or disrespect to women. Much of rap is about the conditions under which rappers live. It's a language they have developed to describe what they go through. They're putting it on record for everyone to hear. I think some of it reflects their lifestyles and the frightening way that they have to live. A lot of people don't know what's going on in communities they don't see, so maybe it's good to awaken our consciousness to some of it.

At Motown, we always avoided records that I thought were bad for society. We decided on a case-by-case basis. I didn't want to put out Norman Whitfield's "Cloud Nine" because I thought it advocated drug use. We discussed it back and forth. He was determined, so I let him do it. But before I did, we voted on it at a company meeting. I voted against it, but the rest were for it. The song was a big hit and was our first Grammy.

But I was always concerned. Artistic freedom is important, but if you think something is damaging to society, that's something else. We have a responsibility not to hurt people willfully. And we must remember that creative people are very powerful. People say it's just music, but music is very powerful.

The Hapa Muse
Rosanna
Pfeifer
Instagram @thehapamuse



Welcome to the Playboy family! What does this mean to you? Being part of the Playboy family means that I'm part of an iconic brand that encourages and inspires women everywhere to celebrate their uniqueness, self-expression, freedom, and authenticity. Growing up a mixed-race minority, I didn't always feel like I fit the traditional standards of beauty. I'm proud to be part of a brand that celebrates and finds beauty in what makes us unique.

What do you think of when it comes to Playboy and the iconic bunny? Iconic, Classic, timeless beauty, self-love, Marilyn Monroe. Being free to express and embrace your authenticity.
Strong, beautiful women embracing and expressing their uniqueness and true nature.

You have such an exotic look, tell us about your background... I am a hapa (Half-Asian), hence "The Hapa Muse". From a young age I knew I was a creative and a performer and that I wanted to do this for a living. As I grew older, I realized that I needed a career to support myself and help me pursue my dreams. I'm grateful that I was raised in a household that placed a strong emphasis on education because this led me to become a Nurse Practitioner. Thankfully, I found the field of Aesthetics, where I'm able to combine my passion of medicine and art.

In 2019, I started my life-long dream of acting which quickly led to my modeling career. I became enthralled with everything about it, especially the self-expression, story-telling and creative process. Modeling became a creative outlet for me, and the first time I fully embraced my uniqueness. In my teen years and young adulthood, I struggled with insecurities and self-identity as a mixed race minority. My mission as a model is to inspire women to embrace what makes them different, because it's their uniqueness which makes them truly beautiful.

How many different languages can you speak? Spanish, Tagalog, and some Ukrainian.
What's your favorite color? Blue; is such a dynamic color to me - there are so many unique and beautiful versions. It's the color of the ocean and the sky. It symbolizes serenity, inspiration, and wisdom.

What type of music do you enjoy most? Favorite artist? Alternative, EDM/dance music are my go-to's, but I also enjoy the 80s synth wave, classical, etc. I enjoy listening to most genres of music, especially dynamic music with poetic lyrics and a good beat. Music has always been a big part of my life, I enjoy playing the violin and piano in my free time.

Favorite movie of all time? Favorite actor? Fight Club or the Matrix. Psychological thrillers are my favorite genre. Anything that really makes you think or breaks down/alters your perception of the world around you. Keanu Reeves - he is such a humble, giving human being. I believe people should use their success in order to create time and opportunities for themselves and for others.

Favorite cocktail drink? Paloma. Anything with good tequila or ginger.

Do you prefer the beach or the pool? Beach! There's nothing like the sound of the waves crashing, the warm sun, and grounding in the sand. It's nature's paradise.

Read the book or watch the movie? Both, but read the book first. Some of my favorite books are: Harry Potter series, The Alienist.

What is your favorite body part on you? on him? My eyes - for the unique color and shape. On him: I'm a sucker for deep, beautiful eyes and a smile that makes me melt.

What attracts you the most in a man? Conscientiousness is by far the most important and attractive quality I look for in a man. To me, this is a quality that encompasses many characteristics. People with high conscientiousness tend to have high emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and integrity. They are typically meticulous, diligent, reliable/responsible, attentive, and careful with everything that they do. Other qualities I find attractive: Gentle/calm in nature, intelligent, dark sense of humor, artsy/creative type, unique, cute/quirky, nice eyes, and genuine smile.

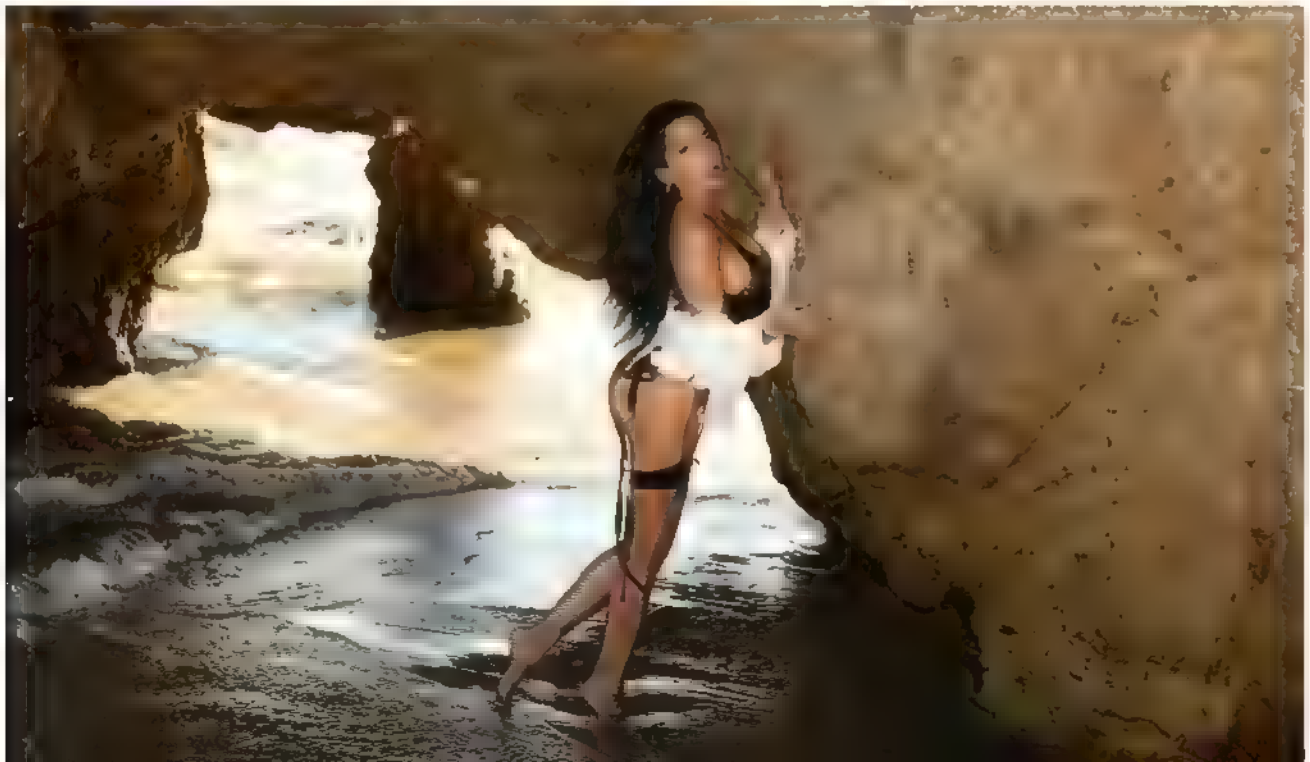
Describe your perfect date: I'm a hopeless romantic. I prefer a date that takes some effort and planning. For example, going to an art museum and having dinner after (sushi).

If you could be any animal, what would you be and why? I know it's a mythical creature, but I have always had reverence and admiration for the phoenix because of its beauty and what it represents. The phoenix obtains new life by rising from its own ashes. To me, this symbolizes being resilient in the face of adversity; having the ability to overcome life's challenges and rebuild in a way that is authentic to you.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? Being a full-time, successful creator. Having the means to inspire through creative outlets - mainly via the modeling and film industry. Owning a successful photography business with my partner Sean and traveling the world. Continuing to chase my dreams and inspiring others to do the same.

One thing I've learned on this journey is we are not limited by the constraints we put on ourselves, or by what other people expect us to be. You have one life to live, so live true and authentic to yourself!

Where can our readers find you? Instagram & TikTok @thehapamuse

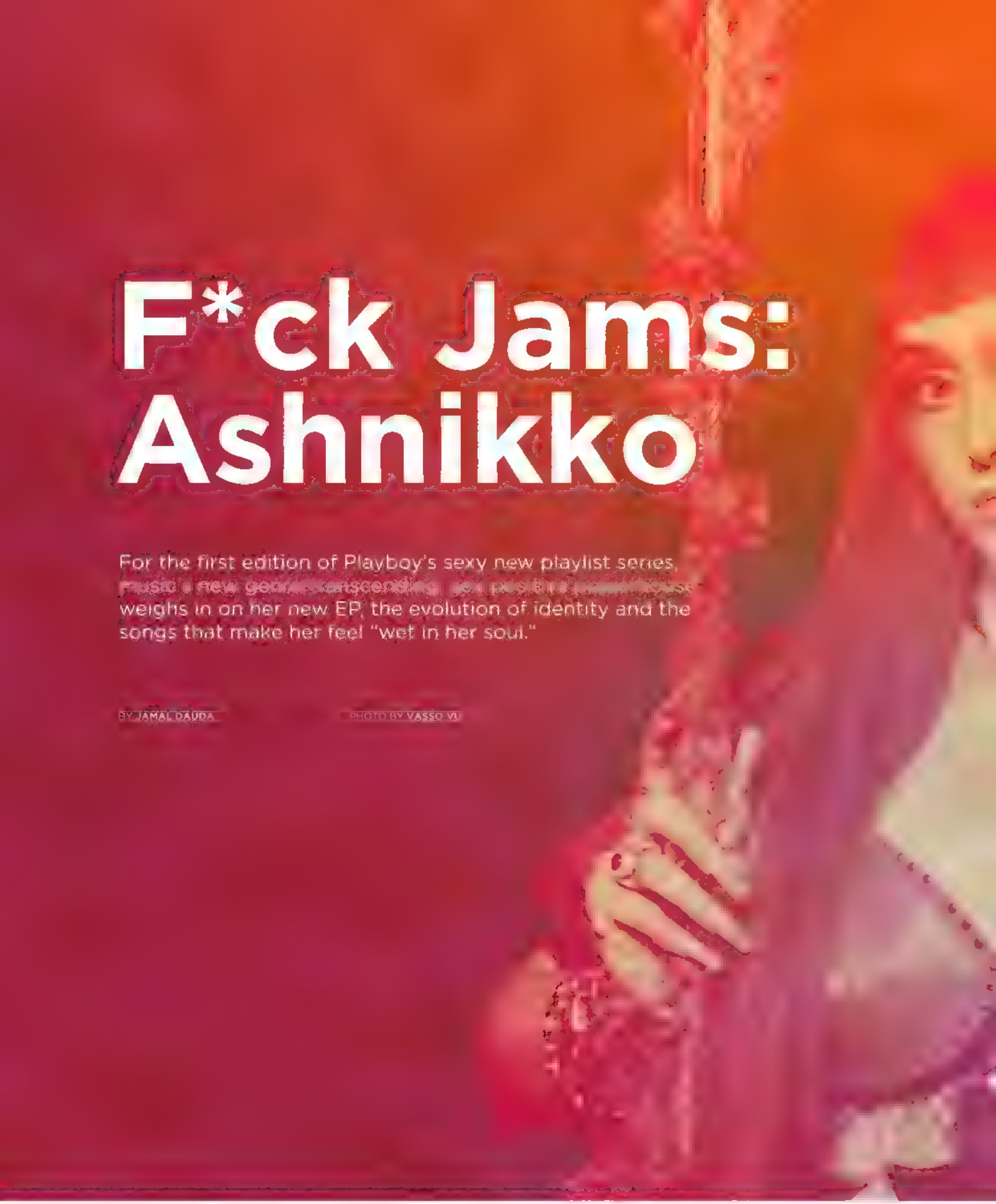


F*ck Jams: Ashnikko

For the first edition of Playboy's sexy new playlist series, [redacted] weighs in on her new EP, the evolution of identity and the songs that make her feel "wet in her soul."

BY JAMAL DAUDA

PHOTO BY VASSO VU



When you decide to launch a playlist series called F*ck Jams, it takes more thoughtfulness than you might imagine. At its simplest, the ask is straightforward. Make a hookup playlist and don't take it too seriously. It could be your go-to throwback R&B songs that set the mood, the perfect song sequence for go time or the best Radiohead songs to cuddle to during that postcoital glow. Yet you still need someone who is in on the hilarity of it all. Someone willing to be thoughtful and vulnerable in ways that feel harder and harder to come by these days with the hyper-curation of the social media age. Lucky for us, Ashnikko is exactly the artist we need for this moment.

The 24-year-old Londoner by way of North Carolina has an innate ability to speak to profound personal truths in the same breath she reminds you that she "drew a dick on all your sweatshirts" in a post breakup fit of rage and closure. Identifying as bisexual, Ashnikko takes equal joy exalting and eviscerating past partners all across the spectrum, but always with an underlying self-awareness that reveals emotional maturity well beyond her years.

The blue-haired, anime-loving, sex-positive powerhouse has been pushing against the patriarchy since her 2018 release, Unlikeable. Brushing aside genre and lazy categorizations at every turn, she's as comfortable inhabiting the role of vigilante dominatrix over hip hop beats ("Daisy") as she is sharing a track with Grimes centered around the disintegration of a female friendship ("Cry"). Her brash, unapologetic lyrics about sex, misogyny in the music industry and the trappings of a digital-first culture (present on her newly released mixtape, Demidevil) show an exhilarating combination of humor and fearlessness that make her the perfect person to discuss pregame playlists, the joy of sex toys and the complexities of representation in media and entertainment. If you are familiar with her, it should come as no surprise that she put together a mix that is equal parts playful and sweet, while being seductive and horny at the same time. No small feat.

For the inaugural edition of Playboy's proprietary new music series, the artist tackles all of the above while taking us on a journey through a masterful weaving of her favorite tracks from Kehlani, Ty Dolla $ign, girl in red and a handful of other artists who are either already on your radar, or, as Ash puts it, sure to "make you feel it in your soul G-spot."

"I like all my songs to make me feel wet in my soul."

PLAYBOY: First and foremost, how have you been? How has quarantine been?

ASHNIKKO: I've been blessed. I'm healthy. My loved ones are healthy. I'm just trying to stay sane and learn some new crafts, like everyone else on Earth.

PLAYBOY: Some artists say, "I miss touring and I miss running around," which would make sense for you since you were pretty hot and heavy into promotional and touring mode. But then some people say, "Actually, I love just being home and making stuff." Which side are you leaning toward currently?

ASHNIKKO: In lockdown, my music has gone from zero to 100, and it's very strange to not be performing the songs that are doing really well. I almost don't have a grasp on reality. Like, I don't know how they're doing until I'll be in a cab and I'll hear the song on the radio and I'm like, "What? People like my songs?" Not having an energy exchange with people in real life is quite weird. The only way to gauge your fans' responses is through online comments, which is toxic.

PLAYBOY: How do you even begin to deal with socials? I've always been told, "Don't even look at comments. Don't even bother, don't even get in there."

ASHNIKKO: It's really bad, but I used to search my name and read the comments. I wanted to be in the know. And then one day I was just like, "I can't do this." So no, I don't read comments, or I will go crazy. I mean, on bad days I'll read them, and then it's like a spiral. It's the worst thing you can do to yourself. And then when it comes to other artists, some people are like, "I'm having such a good time. I'm writing an album and being so creative," and I'm just lying in bed like, "What am I supposed to write about? I have done nothing!"

PLAYBOY: Where are you pulling that inspiration from as an artist in a moment such as this?

ASHNIKKO: There's only so many times I can put the word "lonely" in a song. I don't even want to think about the music that's going to come out of the next year with the hot buzzwords like "lonely," "isolated," "quarantine." It's just—

PLAYBOY: Yeah. I don't think we need a wave of pandemic pop. It's probably a bit much.

ASHNIKKO: Oh my God. That's what it's going to be called.

PLAYBOY: I really hope not. If we bury that and pretend I never said it, then hopefully it won't manifest itself.

ASHNIKKO: At this point, I'm writing made-up stories. I'm like, "This happened and I'm going to write a song about it," even though I'm lying and it didn't happen at all because I have been playing Zelda in my room for eight days straight.

PLAYBOY: I think that's okay. That's called "imagination." You're allowed to do that as an artist. Considering the immersive world you've built for yourself and the way you treat your visuals as this

kind of alternate reality, you're allowed to make up lyrics and lean into fantasy, right?

ASHNIKKO: Thank you. I think there's an element of building a fantasy, almost comic book–like, character in my music as well as visually.

PLAYBOY: Did I read somewhere that you are working on a live show for streaming platforms?

ASHNIKKO: We're working on a fantastical livestream show for you all. I'm hoping for some tentacles. There's going to be some dancing. This is my first time doing choreography for a live performance. I do it on music video sets sometimes, and I always injure myself really badly. I'm kind of uncoordinated, but I'm looking forward to the challenge of being a real pop girlie. This is my dream!

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about this sweet, sweet playlist, shall we? I think sometimes people try to play it too cool, as if they're not listening to other stuff that's out there or they're not aware of other musical contemporaries. But what I love is that this is a really ahead-of-the-curve playlist. There are some people on here who you can tell are going to break any minute. You're really on your A&R tip on this.

ASHNIKKO: One day, I'm going to be an A&R executive.

PLAYBOY: What was your thought process in putting it together?

ASHNIKKO: I was thinking of different speeds—different thrust speeds. I was thinking about songs that make me feel sexy. It's not even necessarily about sex; it's more about the feeling I feel when I like a song. It's almost like I get aroused. When you hear a song and you're just like, "Oh, yes. This song makes me feel so fucking wet in my soul." That's what I'm talking about. I like all my songs to make me feel wet in

Courtesy Charlotte Rutherford

Courtesy Charlotte Rutherford

my soul, you know?

PLAYBOY: Yes, absolutely. I think that's generally a good sign

ASHNIKKO: Yeah. Your G-spot. Your soul G-spot, you know? That's all I have to say.

PLAYBOY: You did an awesome job of balancing out the vibe. I remember someone saying to me once, "There are people who sing about sex and people who make inherently sexy music, and those aren't necessarily the same thing." You are also drawn to interesting vocal melodies. The production styles are all over the place, but there's a lot of beautiful vocals here. Like the Shygirl track—the way she delivers "Bawdy" is unique.

ASHNIKKO: Shygirl is really cool. I love her. It's sexy and it's sexual. I think we can put all the songs on here into two categories.

PLAYBOY: That's exactly what I love. There's a balance, where you have Big Sean and Ty Dolla, which are more explicit lyrically, and then some songs that are a bit more nuanced.

ASHNIKKO: But with Ty's melodies, it doesn't matter what he's singing. They're sexy. I said a while ago in an interview, "Ty Dolla $ign could sing, 'Pee, pee, poo, poo, diarrhea,' and I would love it."

PLAYBOY: I was talking to a friend recently about the contrast between the male and female gaze in film, and how you can feel the difference when a female director shoots love scenes versus a male one. Does the same thing apply to songwriting? Do you think men and women write about relationships in inherently different ways?

ASHNIKKO: I feel like there have been songs that are written by women but are very much for the male gaze, full of tropes. I have a song on my new mixtape called "Slumber Party." I was playing with those tropes a little bit, kind of as a joke. Now it's on the mixtape and already pressed to vinyl, the other day, I was like, "Oh my God. What if people don't understand that I was just making fun of tropes in pop music when women talk about being with other women?" I was up until like 4 A.M. thinking about it.

PLAYBOY: I wouldn't worry too much. I think your track record speaks for itself. The way you've handled the topic of queer sexuality in your songwriting and talking about feminism in a genuinely intersectional way on socials. I think people would be hard-pressed to accuse you of being disingenuous.

ASHNIKKO: The internet can do anything though. This is one thing I've learned this year. I can't control it and I just have to let go. What people think about me is really just none of my business.

PLAYBOY: And it doesn't mean they're right.

ASHNIKKO: Yeah, but I definitely agree that there are a lot of performative queer-baiting songs in pop music.

PLAYBOY: Agreed, but you managed to lean into a few songs in this playlist that are very much not that. They are sweet and genuine, like the two girl in red tracks and Kehlani's "Honey." Really sincere and kind of universal stories.

ASHNIKKO: I love girl in red. I actually am realizing that I meant to put girl in red's "two queens in a king sized bed" on this list.

PLAYBOY: You did! You ended the whole thing with it.

ASHNIKKO: Oh, did I? Okay, cool. All right. Good!

PLAYBOY: You also threw a new Megan Thee Stallion song in there, Meg and SZA. And these choices make sense, because, like the three artists we're talking about, you feel like part of this really amazing continuum that's happening right now, in which, much to the chagrin of the people who have preconceived notions about what women in music should be discussing, women are talking about and owning their sexuality. Are you very open about sexuality in your life generally, or is it just in these songs?

ASHNIKKO: If you asked any of my friends, they'd be like, "Ash really goes into full detail about her sex life." I just don't have any filter when it comes to that. I don't think there's any taboo. For me, it's just a very natural part of being alive.

PLAYBOY: Why is it seemingly so intimidating for men when women own it? You can talk about a dick all day, but why is it weird when you want to talk about the female G-spot?

ASHNIKKO: I mean, you see in Hollywood films that when men cum, the rating is usually PG-13. Ejaculation can still make it into a PG-13 movie, but as soon as you see women owning their own pleasure, it's an issue. You see women wearing a bra mid-sex. I've never worn a bra during sex in my life. Just so, so weird. I think my desire to talk about my sexuality probably stemmed from being from the South. I'm from a conservative small town where it was definitely very hush-hush, very sinful to touch your clitoris. My mom has actually been quite open with me about it, but other family members are very conservative, very prudish when it comes to that stuff.

For a while, I was convinced that my own sexuality was quite sinful. That's what people around me told me. It's really embarrassing now to think back on it, but it took me so long to finally admit to myself and to finally come out. I think now I'm very outspoken because I don't want other young people to feel that way. I think representation is so important.

"It's not even necessarily about sex; it's more about the feeling I feel when I like a song."

Do you remember Naya Rivera? She played a queer character on Glee, and I was really sad when I found out she had passed. I feel like a lot of us block out difficult parts of our childhood. A memory came to me of being 12 or 13 and really struggling with being attracted to my best friend, and being mad at myself about that and thinking I was sinful. Then seeing Naya Rivera on Glee, I was really happy and I remember showing my mom an episode of the show and being like, "See? She likes girls."

PLAYBOY: I've heard similar stories from so many people I know. If you're talking about sexuality, race or gender, as humans, there is something about seeing yourself in art, sports, culture—all throughout society—in a way that's celebrated. It makes all the difference when you're trying to figure out who you are and where you sit in the midst of it all.

ASHNIKKO: Exactly. I'm still figuring out my sexuality and learning new things about my own pleasure and my body. You know, just learning about myself all the time. It's nice to hear songs and see pop stars talk about their queerness in a very honest, non–male gaze-y way.

PLAYBOY: People can go their entire lives without prioritizing or trying to figure out their own sense of pleasure and what makes them happy and how to communicate it. It can be a lifelong journey, and it can change frequently.

ASHNIKKO: I think it being a lifelong journey is very important because some people think they have to be one thing forever, that they can't learn about themselves.

PLAYBOY: Or can't unpack things slowly. You start off in one place in life and you think it's fundamentally who you are, but we all have doubts or these quiet voices we don't always listen to or understand. As you learn about other peoples' experiences and put yourself in new situations, you evolve. It's a really magical part of being human. We can go through metamorphosis in ways that surprise even ourselves.

ASHNIKKO: I've always been into sex toys, from when I was, like, 18 years old—as soon as I could go into the 18-plus part of Cyberdog. I was like, "I am getting a vibrator. I am going to try it out." I think over lockdown, it gave me a real opportunity to get into sex toys, which was really cool. I was like, "I'm 24 years old and I'm learning new things about my body." I would like to think I can learn about my body and my sexuality for my entire life, and evolve.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever think about which of your own tracks people are most likely to hook up to?

ASHNIKKO: Which of my songs do I think people will fuck to? I think "Halloweenie." "You've never had a love like me / Never hit a drug like me, fuck like me / She'll never eat the butt like me / Only tricks for your ass, it's Halloween." I had someone message me saying that they lost their virginity to that song.

PLAYBOY: And there you have it!

ASHNIKKO: On the flip side of that, I make music about sex positivity with sexual themes, but I get a lot of unsolicited sexual messages from people, which is really kind of gross. A lot of girls send me really, really explicit videos. They're like, "You make me feel so powerful," and they're like jacking off. I'm like, "No, don't send me that." There's a quote I read online from the artist Bobby Lynn: "Unfriendly reminder: I may sexualize myself, but that doesn't mean it's open season for you to send me inappropriate or gross DMs." I saw this yesterday and thought, "That."

PLAYBOY: I wholeheartedly agree. I know we're probably running out of time, so I'm going to end our talk with this: I was doing my normal rounds on Reddit—the Old Testament of the internet, as I like to call it.

ASHNIKKO: Oh, gosh. The Old Testament of the internet. I'm using that. Sorry. That was good.

PLAYBOY: All yours. I saw this hilarious post in a music forum where people talk about what makes a song sexy. People started rattling off all of these random things, so I'm going to name things and you can just quick-hit tell me: Does this make a song sexy for you?

ASHNIKKO: Okay.

PLAYBOY: Falsetto?

ASHNIKKO: Not for me.

PLAYBOY: Opening with a hot take, I like it. Saxophone?

ASHNIKKO: No.

PLAYBOY: Breathing noises?

ASHNIKKO: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Reverb?

ASHNIKKO: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Cowbell?

ASHNIKKO: No.

PLAYBOY: Banjo?

ASHNIKKO: Yes. Yes.

PLAYBOY: Really?

ASHNIKKO: I love the banjo. Also, the steel guitar.

PLAYBOY: Slide guitar is money.

ASHNIKKO: Love that.

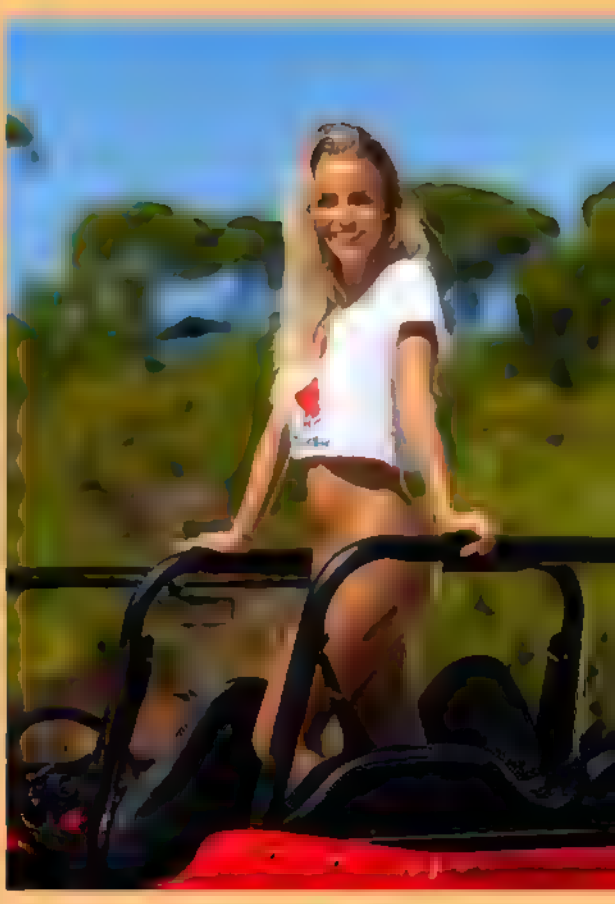
PLAYBOY: Well, that's it. That's all I got for you.

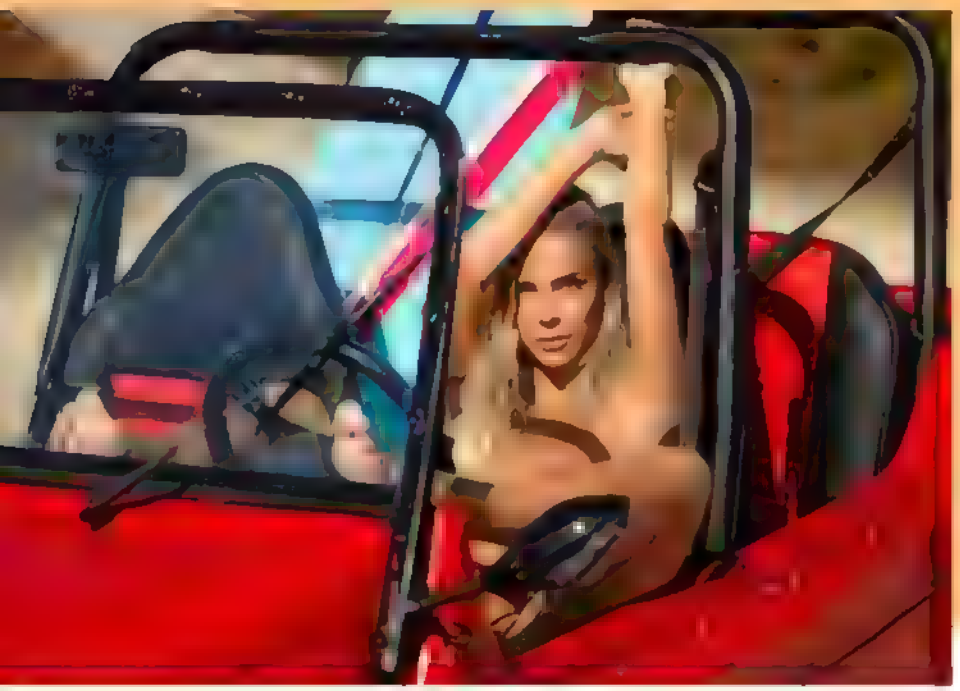
Playboy
Taylor
Brumann

Photography by
Producer: Sonc
Makeup and hai
Photography A
Video: Filipe Fig
Aerial Images P

PLAYBOY

PLAYBOY





Birth: 19 12 1996
Instagram account: @taylor brumann
Measures: 86/62/92
Height: 170cm
Weight: 51kg
Country where you live: Switzerland
Country you were born in: Sw tzerland
Occupation: Model
Favorite movie: Shutter sland
Favorite music: techno/house/anyth ng to s.ng along to
Favorite book: don't have one but anything with psychology fascinates me

Describe yourself. Tell us a little about yourself and your personality.
I have different personalities haha. I would say I'm a really open minded and cheerful person most of the time. I tend to be a bit hyperactive so I talk a lot and I can't sit still for too long... I'm very communicative with everyone. On the other hand, I am really sarcastic and most people can't always keep up with that. I'm also a very strong person emotionally and very deep. I have a lot of empathy and understanding for almost everything. Self reflects a lot.

How was the shooting for Playboy with Ana Dias?
It was truly amazing! Ana and her team were so kind and funny! They made me feel very comfortable and we laughed a lot. Really good energy on the set. I loved it!

What are your career ambitions?
I want to keep modeling and growing. Also I want to start with acting which I am doing now... slowly getting there ;)

Describe hobbies/interests/special skills.
I love traveling, walking a lot, hanging out with my friends, being in nature, listening to good music and drinking good wine. Special skills..... I do ski and would say I'm good at it but besides that..... I'm good at packing my suitcase? Does that count haha?

What makes you happy?
A lot of things can make me happy. sunshine, good people, good energy, nature, good food, good photoshoots ;)

Who is your celebrity crush? And why?
I was never the type of girl who had a celebrity crush butttt I would say Brad Pitt in a bit younger than now haha. He is very handsome and I like his manly and calm energy.

What do you love most about your body?
hmmmm... my collarbones and arms hahahah or my face I guess...

How do you feel about posing nude?
It always depends. I have no problem with it unless I feel comfortable with my surroundings and the people I work with.

What is at the top of your bucket list?
Keep traveling to new places!

What is the craziest thing you did?
Skydiving a few weeks ago!

What's your guiltiest pleasure?
Chocolate, wine and pasta...

When do you feel sexiest?
When I put on nice lingerie or when I'm super happy and comfortable with life

You're particularly turned on by:
Good vibes, authentic people, funny people, depth between people

You're turned off by:
Drama, rude people, unthankful people

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